THE BRIGHTEST STORY PAPER OF ALL.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 491. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 28TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

A LESSON TO BREADWINNERS UPON CHEAP LIVING.

Every one of us, from the highest to the lowest, desires pleasant and palatable food and drink. The only question of how to satisfy this natural desire is too often one of expense. If, therefore, it can be explained how a food that is at the same time a delicious beverage, and thus answers a double purpose in the building up of the human constitution, can be the means of a considerable saving to breadwinners in the household, we know that the explanation will be read with interest by many thousands of readers.

To say that we all eat too much flesh food and drink too much tea or coffee is unnecessary. This is fully understood by the majority of us; but another question arises. De we not, as students of economy in household matters, eat too much bread?

There is no doubt that we live in an age of worry and excitement, and as the struggle for existence is anything but conducive to good digestion or an appetite that can relish anything, the palate of the average work-a-day individual has to be tickled and tempted in a variety of ways.

Many people are bewildered what to turn to for a beverage which shall be at once agreeable to the taste and, in these days of dear bread, supply the desired nourishing and stimulating qualities.

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SHORT STORIES

TALES OF LOVE WIT PATHOS HUMOUR STRATEGY ETC.

No. 491.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending May 28th, 1898.

Edited by ARTHUR PEARSON

The Unprofessional Detective.

PROFESSOR GILMAN was sitting in the library at the Royal Astronomical Society, putting the finishing touches to a lecture on double stars, when a card was handed to him.

He was rather vexed at being interrupted, but he felt bound to see his visitor—Lieutenant Clifford; and, putting his papers aside, he rose and went into the waiting-room.

Lieutenant Clifford met the professor with a pleasant smile and extended hand, and then introduced a gentleman whom he called Mr. Gray. The professor gave this gentleman a keen glance, and then turned to the lieutenant, and waited to hear what he had to say.

The lieutenant seemed at some loss how to begin; but, after a moment's hesitation, said:

"Professor Gilman, I do not suppose I have the slightest right to come here this morning upon the business that has brought me, and it is only at the earnest solicitations of my friend, Mr. Gray, that I have consented to come. Mr. Gray is a detective, and he is at work upon a puzzling case. In conversation with me, last evening, he expressed discouragement in the matter, and I remarked that if he could manage to enlist your services I was sure his difficulties would soon vanish. I then told him of your masterly detective abilities and of the clever manner in which you cleared up the mystery of Colonel Cresswell's death, and nothing would do but I must bring him to you. I know that I am trespassing very greatly upon your good nature, but I hope you will be kind enough to help Mr. Gray, and I think you will be interested in the problem."

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Professor Gilman was a great man in the scientific world, but he was only human, and his vanity was tickled by the reference to the Cresswell case. He had taken that affair in hand when the detectives were quite puzzled, simply because Clifford—the son of an old friend—was pecuniarily concerned in it, and he had solved the problem with surprising rapidity.

He now announced his willingness to assist Mr. Gray, if possible, and a few minutes later the three were seated in the library and Gray was giving particulars of the case.

"This is a case of robbery," began the detective, "the theft of some very valuable diamonds—at least, the jewels have disappeared; and there is every reason to suppose they were stolen. The robbery occurred at the house of a wealthy gentleman named Hilton, in Crown Street. It was first noticed that the diamonds were missing about a week ago. Four stones were missing altogether; one large and very valuable one, which formed the centre of a breast-pin, two lesser, but still costly ones, which were set as pendants in ear-rings, and a fourth, still smaller, which was set in a ring. This fourth stone, and the settings of all of them, have been discovered, but the most diligent search has failed to reveal the whereabouts of the other gems.

"When I took charge of the case, the facts which the owners of the jewels were able to give me were of the most meagre kind. Summed up, they amounted to little more than that the things had disappeared, that there was no evidence of burglars having entered the house, and that, consequently, some one of the servants must have taken them. It transpired that the mistress of the house was very careless about her jewels, that she was in the habit of leaving them in an unlocked jewel case on her dressing-table; sometimes, so her husband averred, she did not take the trouble to even put them in the jewel case, but left them stuck upon a pin-cushion or in some other equally tempting position. Moreover, when she was out in the afternoon or evening, the door of her room was seldom locked; and it would have been the easiest thing in the world for any of the servants to slip into the room, gather up whatever treasures might be lying about, and slip out again without anybody being the wiser. One servant could do it as easily as another. Angie, Mrs. Hilton's maid, would, of course, have a better opportunity than the others. But she is a woman in whom Mrs. Hilton puts implicit trust.

"The first thing I did was to institute a very thorough search throughout all the rooms in the house. Angie, the maid, was not only willing, but eager to have her room and all her belongings searched. People with reputations for honesty sometimes succumb to temptation, therefore, we did not make less thorough search in Angie's room, because of her mistress's faith in her. But we found nothing in her room.

"The other servants included a butler, a French male cook, a scullery maid, and a housemaid. I instituted, apparently with the greatest willingness on the part of each, just as rigid a search in their respective rooms as I had done in Angie's. The result in each case was the same. The missing jewels were nowhere to be found.

"I was not alone in prosecuting the search. The servants, who all knew of the missing stones before I took up the case, were searching, one and all, for the lost jewels. With all the servants cognizant of the loss, and consequently more on their guard against suspicion, my difficulties were multiplied, as you can imagine.

"On the second day after the loss was discovered, François, the French cook, brought me the gold settings of the ring, pin, and ear-rings.

"He had found them in the rubbish box in the yard behind the house—at least, he said so. But the diamonds were still missing.

"Well, I felt convinced that the guilty person was someone in the house; presumably one of the servants, as there was no reason to suspect that Mr. Hilton would steal them from his wife, or that their daughter, Maud, a girl of fifteen, would steal them from her mother. From the list of possible guilty ones I was disposed to leave out also the maid, Angie. This left the cook; Kitson, the butler; Mary, the scullery maid; and Jane, the housemaid.

"The fact that François found the settings may be counted either for or against him, as one views the case; it may have been a genuine discovery or a mere "blind." There is, however, more damaging evidence against him.

"In searching through those portions of the house over which François presided, I was not forgetful of the case in which a chef concealed some stolen diamonds in a loaf of bread, and I was on the look out for all sorts of odd places where these jewels might possibly be hidden. But the diamonds were not concealed in eatables of any kind; for we subjected everything of that nature to the most searching examination. However, this line of search resulted indirectly in the finding of one of the missing jewels—the smallest.

"Kitson, having witnessed some of the odd places and things that had been so carefully examined by me, said jestingly to the cook: 'François, I think you must have those diamonds in that bottle of wine which you are so careful about.' Then turning to me, the butler said: 'François has a bottle of rare vintage, which is his very own, and I don't know how many years old. He takes a little sip of it now and then, but he won't let any of us look at it hardly.'

"'Ah,' I said, 'suppose we look at the bottle.'

"François brought it with great cheerfulness, and hospitably invited me to take a sip. The bottle was about half full, and the glass being clear, I could easily see, by turning it on its side and revolving it slowly, that the diamonds were not in the wine.

"I was about to return it to François, when I bethought me of the cork. Extracting it from the bottle, I scrutinised it carefully, and fancied I could see a faint line, as if the cork had been slit part of the way up and then glued together again. Taking my penknife, I cut the cork in two parts, and lo! reposing snugly in a little hollow in the centre, was the smallest of the missing diamonds.

"François stared, turned pale, and began to protest his utter ignorance as to how the diamond got into that cork. Kitson came bravely to the cook's defence, and said emphatically that he didn't believe François was guilty in spite of the evidence against him. He thought it was 'a put up job,' the work of someone who had a grudge against him.

"Well, there isn't a cork in all that house now that has not been cut in two—or a dozen—parts; but the other three diamonds are still undiscovered. Their whereabouts is a complete mystery. Of course, it looks black for François; but I am not yet convinced that he is guilty. He continues to earnestly protest his innocence, and Kitson stands by him unfalteringly. Every place that I can think of where François could possibly conceal the other diamonds has been most carefully searched. But the result has always been the same. I

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believe the diamonds must be concealed somewhere in that house, but where is beyond my comprehension. I am at my wit's end in the matter."

"And you want to splice my wits on to where yours end? Is that it?" inquired Professor Gilman.

"Yes; that expresses it very well."

The professor sat musing for a moment. Whether this particular case interested him, or whether his appetite for solving difficult problems had been whetted by his success in the Cresswell case, I am unable to say. I have only to report the fact that before sixty seconds had elapsed after the last words of the detective, Professor Gilman said:

"Very well, I will see what I can do. Let us take a cab, and go up to the house in Crown Street."

Lieutenant Clifford, having other duties, left the professor and the detective, and they proceeded to the house together.

Arrived at the Hilton House, Mr. Gray and the professor entered, and the latter asked to be permitted to see the room from which the jewels had been taken. His examination of the room was only cursory, his object being to note its relative position to other rooms in the house, and the ease or difficulty with which it might be reached from the servants' quarters. Then he said he would like to go down to the kitchen.

The finding of the diamond in the cork of the wine bottle had been regarded as sufficient evidence against François to warrant his being detained by the police, and in place of the Frenchman there was now installed a portly female cook, of not uncomely face and figure, to whom Kitson had already begun to make love in a mild fashion.

Kitson had a large flat face and small eyes. The professor cast one of his keen glances at him, then favoured each of the other servants in the same way, and after that seemingly took little notice of them. He suggested to Mr. Gray, somewhat to the latter's surprise, that he ask the servants to help him in the search. The professor made a rather careful examination of the kitchen and the adjacent rooms, propounding an occasional question to the detective. Kitson and the other servants, unaware who the distinguished man was, indulged in some scarcely-concealed merriment at the professor's participation in the case.

After looking about for half an hour, some of the time in what seemed like purposeless fashion, the professor, in a low tone, said to the detective:

"Now, I want you to get these servants away from me—all but the new cook; she's busy about her cooking, and will not mind me, nor I her. The others will follow you easily enough. They're not afraid of me, and they are of you. Ask Kitson and the others to help you look for the diamonds up on the second floor. You've looked there before, but never mind. They'll think you suppose you may have overlooked some place."

The professor was in the scullery in the basement, when he said this, and he stayed there with pretence of poking about while the detective, Kitson, and the maid left and ascended to the rooms on the second floor. Then the professor went out into a back passage which he had a few minutes before been searching. Here his eyes rested eagerly on a row of iron hooks against the wooden partition.

On one of the hooks hung a faded and somewhat worn coat. This the professor took off its hook, and began making a thorough examination of the various pockets. About the only thing he found in the pockets was a soiled envelope which had passed through the post. The professor read the name on the envelope, and then returned it to the pocket. He did not return the coat to the hook until he had felt all along where the lining was sewed to the material. Had there been anything as large as one of the missing diamonds concealed within the lining or in any of the pockets, he would certainly have found it. But he found nothing, and after hanging the coat back on the hook he stood with a perplexed look on his face.

After pondering a little while his face brightened suddenly, and he went down into the kitchen once more. In his previous search there he had noticed a screw-driver among other tools in a box. Securing this, he returned to the passage.

A quarter of an hour later the professor appeared in the room where the detective and the others were searching. For a few minutes or so he joined in the search, and then he remarked that there was no use searching in this blind fashion, and suggested to Gray that they had better give it up for a while and take a walk.

The butler let them out at the front door, casting a rather derisive smile after the professor as he descended the steps.

"Well," the detective said, after they had walked a short distance, "have you formed any opinion as to who is the guilty party or as to where the jewels are?"

"Yes," replied the professor. "I may say that I formed an opinion about the thief before I came to the house, and after I reached there I verified it. Kitson is the guilty man."

"Kitson!"

"Yes. And as to the jewels——"

"You think you know where the diamonds are?"

"Yes, I'm sure I do. I've got them in my hand!"

And the professor unfolded a piece of crumpled paper and exposed to the detective's astonished gaze the three missing diamonds.

The professor enjoyed the detective's astonishment for a moment, and then said:

"Listen. I will tell you how I came to find them so quickly. When you told me how the smaller of the missing stones was found in the cork I at once thought, 'That proves the cook's innocence rather than confirms his guilt. If he had known the diamond was concealed in the cork, he would certainly have substituted another before bringing the bottle to you. He would have taken no risk.' That he didn't, I say, is proof that he didn't know it was concealed there. But somebody, of course, did know it. And who was this person? Naturally, the one who suggested looking there; and Kitson was that person. It's simple enough, isn't it?"

"Yes," returned the detective. "Of course, I have thought Kitson might be the guilty person, and the fact that he suggested examining the wine bottle is against him. The thought isn't new; it occurred to me at the time. But the manful way in which he defended François staggered me. If he wanted to cast suspicion on him, it seemed to me he wouldn't be the first to defend him."

"That's where the man's cunning comes in. His cunning isn't of a specially high order; still, he has considerable of it such as it is, and he doubtless thought that if he could once get suspicion definitely directed towards François he could very well afford to defend him—first, because such defence would count for but little for François, and second, because it would have the effect of lessening suspicion against himself provided any were disposed to suspect him on account of

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his suggestion that the bottle be examined. Kitson wasn't really wise in the matter, else he would have put all the diamonds in one place and made no attempt to cast suspicion on another, but simply taken his chance with the rest. Had he been wiser he would have reflected that when a guilty man is confronted with proof of his guilt, nine times out of ten he will falter and confess. He, of course, knew that when the diamonds should be found in the cork François could not confess and tell where the other stolen diamonds were, for the good reason that he didn't know.

"Kitson should, therefore, have known that when a detective, familiar with this principle in crime, saw that François failed to confess, the finding of the diamond in his bottle would tend rather to remove suspicion than to cast it upon him.

"I reasoned thus, at all events, and I entered upon the task of hunting for these diamonds, reasonably certain that François was not the thief, and equally confident that Kitson was, because he was the person to throw out the hint about the wine bottle. Perhaps you will inquire why he selected François as the person upon whom suspicion should be cast—what animus prompted that particular selection? I can't tell you. There may have been jealousies; I haven't inquired.

"Convinced in my mind of Kitson's guilt, when I arrived at the house and began a search in his presence I did a very simple and natural thing—I watched him. I didn't seem to, it is true, and I suppose he has no idea that I did. In fact, I think he summed me up as a harmless and rather brainless old man—one of whom he need have little fear. While I was searching, and seeming not to notice him, I kept my eye constantly upon him, noting the slightest changes of expression on his face. If the diamonds were concealed anywhere about the house I believed that so long as I had Kitson with me I could tell when it was 'getting hot,' as children say when they play 'hide and seek.' That was why I wanted him with me in the search. I proposed to make him tell me, not by words but by his face, where the diamonds were hidden. And I made him do it, though he doesn't suspect it yet.

"I could see, when we were searching in the kitchen, that he was unconcerned and quite easy in mind. But when we came into that passage there came upon the face of my man the very expression I was looking for.

"It wasn't a marked change of expression. Not at all. It was a change to be felt rather than seen, if I may so state it. It was as if his own growing trepidation of spirit on approaching near to the hiding-place of the gems, his own vague apprehensions that, after all, the hiding-place was not secure, were subtly communicable to me. It was thus I read him, and I said to myself as we went into the passage: 'It is indeed, getting hot. In another moment he will tell me where the diamonds are hidden.' And he did. He cast one quick, apprehensive glance at the wall where an old coat hung upon a hook, and I said to myself, 'Now, Kitson, you can go; I have no further need of you.'

"I made a pretence of searching further, until Kitson's apprehensions were quieted and I could say a word to you. Then, after you had all left me, I returned to the passage. 'He's a bolder man than I thought,' I said to myself, as I took the coat from the hook and began to search pockets and lining. Yes, sir, I actually thought, at first, that he had counted on the very boldness of such a course misleading people—that no one would subject an old coat hanging up in such a conspicuous place to a thorough examination, and therefore, that the diamonds might safely be hidden in the lining. Such an act would have been folly or genius, according to how it resulted. But Kitson's genius was not of that bold order. I did not find in the coat what I was looking for, and when I had fully assured myself that no diamonds were concealed in it, I thought, 'Is it possible I was mistaken in Kitson's look? If I was, then I am at sea, and may as well give up.' But I did not really believe I was mistaken.

"I pondered a little, and then the idea which should have come to me first, flashed upon me. Getting a screw-driver, I removed the screws that held in place the iron hook on which the coat hung, and snugly ensconced in a little hole behind the hook, I found, wrapped in a piece of paper, the things I was looking for. I secured the hook in its original position once more, and Kitson still fancies the diamonds are safe. Now let us go back to the house and inform our cunning butler that his booty has taken wings."

"Professor," said the detective admiringly, "pardon the expression, but you are a gem!"

The professor smiled.

"But," continued the detective, "Kitson will deny all knowledge of how the diamonds came there. How are you going to prove his connection with them?"

"Patience!" returned the professor.

Kitson met them at the door, and seemed a little surprised at their early return.

"Kitson," said the professor, without any preliminary beating about the bush, "we have found the stolen diamonds, and we know that you are the thief. You may as well acknowledge it first as last."

The butler's face grew red with rage, and his small eyes looked hatred at the professor.

"You lie, you old idiot, and you know it!" he cried. "You come poking about here, and then accuse a respectable man of being a thief. It's my belief that you, and this other smooth-faced scoundrel!"—with a glance at the detective—"know a good deal more about them stolen goods than you've told."

"It's true; we do," the professor said blandly. "And it's our purpose now to tell what we know. You stole the diamonds, threw away the settings, placed the least valuable one in Francois' bottle in a mean attempt to cast suspicion on him, and then concealed the others behind a hook in the passage downstairs."

"You lie!" shouted Kitson, but his face blanched.

"Steady!" said the professor. "When you hid the diamonds you forgot that you were hiding with them convincing evidence against yourself. It wasn't shrewd of you to roll the diamonds up in an old envelope that was addressed to you," and the professor produced a little parcel. Unfolding it, he displayed the diamonds to Kitson, and held up to his gaze the paper from which he had just unrolled them. It was the old envelope which Professor Gilman had found in the coat hanging upon the hook. It was addressed to "Mr. J. Kitson."

Kitson stared dumfounded. Then he found his voice.

"I didn't wrap them in that paper. I wouldn't be such a fool!"

"What did you use?—a piece of newspaper?" inquired the professor innocently.

"Yes; I was very particular not to take anything that would—" then he stopped abruptly.

"Well, it's unimportant what paper you used," the professor said, with a cold smile, "since you admit using some. Mr. Gray," turning to the detective, "I will leave this man for you to deal with now. I must go and finish my lecture."

James Perry.

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Born of a Tear.

In bygone ages, and in a distant land, there once lived an old king and bard, who was wont to sing a beautiful poem as he sat on the shore of the murmuring sea. His own tones impressed him so deeply that he would weep, and the tears, rolling down his cheeks, fell into the waves below, where they were changed into pearls.

About three hundred years ago it came to pass that a fisherman found in his nets one of these beautiful pearls, shaped like a heart, and the Doge of Venice presented it to Her Excellency Centarina Centarini, the wife of one of the lords of the Republic.

In spite of youth, wealth, and beauty, Centarina was not happy, for, in the third year of her married life, she had lost her only child. Twelve anniversaries had come and gone since that fatal day, and neither she nor her husband dared hope that Heaven would send them another treasure in place of the little dead girl.

One day, as Centarina was stepping out of her gondola to attend a sermon at the Church of San Zanipola, a poor old woman, followed by two lean and ragged urchins, begged her for a little alms in very pathetic tones. Centarina handed her a sequin, which the beggar received with an outburst of gratitude, crying:

"May Heaven bless your excellency, you, and your children! May the Holy Madonna fill you with joy!"

The fair Venetian was somewhat affected by these words as she entered the church, where a monk was preaching on education. He illustrated his discourse by the story of the Roman matron, Cornelia, who had said of her sons:

"These are my jewels!"

"Ah," thought Centarina, "If only I still had my precious child instead of the costly pearl the Doge has given me!"

After the sermon, as she was returning to the palace of the Madonna dell'Orto, she fell asleep in her gondola, and thought she heard a voice utter the strange words:

"If you do not wish to lose her, beware of poetry and of music!"

She awoke with a start, bewildered by her dream, and filled with an unaccountable anxiety. On reaching her palace an unusual disturbance was the greeting that awaited her, caused by a dispute among the servants, who ran towards her, all talking at the same time, each accusing the other of having left the front door open. Some person, they said, must have entered the palace stealthily with a small child, whose cries were even now plainly audible, and who had been discovered in her excellency's private apartments, nestling in the silver crib that had been empty for twelve years.

Centarina would listen to no more explanations, and, waving off the domestics with an imperious gesture, she flew to her room.

There in the silver cradle lay a baby, white as marble, with eyes like the waves of the ocean, and who, on seeing Centarina, instantly ceased wailing, and stretched out its little arms in confiding, trustful innocence. Centarina ran to her jewel-case. It was open, and the famous pearl of the Doge had disappeared! And she understood that the Almighty had read the desire of her heart, and had granted the prayer of the old beggar woman on the church steps.

Wild with joy, she snatched up the child, dressed it in the clothes of the dear departed one, and sent for her husband, to whom she confessed all—the lucky omen, her prayer, and the miracle that had befallen her. His Excellency Giovanni Centarini replied that probably a thief had carried off the gem and forsaken the child; but his wife seemed to find so much happiness with her new treasure that he gladly adopted the little one, naming it Margherita, whose saint's day it happened to be.

When the child commenced to talk she persisted in calling herself Malgari, till at length everyone adopted that curious appellation. Malgari grew rapidly, and would have been the loveliest child in Venice but for her extreme and strange pallor. The servants of Centarina's household and the Venetian ladies who were jealous of the child's good fortune maintained that this pallor was the certain sign of a base origin: but her features were so noble, so delicate, her voice so harmonious and gentle, that such insinuations became ridiculous.

She was ever bright and happy, flitting through the palace like a ray of sunshine, while her silvery peals of laughter resounded everywhere in bird-like, merry trills. But when, perchance, she overheard a rough or unkind word, or witnessed an act of brutality, if a story of pain or poverty were told before her, if her father and mother disagreed on some trifling subject, and, above all, if a falsehood was uttered in her presence, Malgari became strangely melancholy and silent.

She was about four years old when, one summer's night, a barge floated by the palace on the canal of the Madonna dell'Orto, bearing a singer, who accompanied himself on the guitar. Malgari, who was sleeping with her mother, awoke, slipped out of bed, crept to the window, and stood there motionless, listening intently to the sweet strains until they died away in the direction of San Arloris, when she fell fainting to the ground.

On regaining consciousness in her mother's arms she begged to return to the window where she had heard those lovely strains of music.

For three days and three nights the child was a prey to a violent fever, and in her delirium insisted that some one was calling her, that she wanted to go away, that she was not a Venetian, and embracing the poor distracted Centarina, she pleaded: "Mother, take me away! Take me away!"

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Centarina then rememembered the words she had heard in her dream, and, convinced that in Venice it would be out of the question to keep Malgari deprived of music or of songs, she asked her husband to start for Syra, a small island of the Greek Archipelago, where she owned a palace hidden in a grove of olives, oleanders, and orange trees, right by the sea coast. The only inhabitants of the island were some gardeners and others in the employ of the family.

His Excellency Giovanni Centarini told her she was foolish, and that he could not leave Venice under any consideration. But his wife had her own way, as wives ever will, and started off alone with the child.

The small population of Syra suddenly received the order to give up all musical instruments and songs—even the church bells became silent; for, on the evening of Malgari's arrival, at the hour of vespers, the child had been greatly perturbed by the gentle chimes mingling with the roar of the wind and of the waves. Her illness seemed to have carried away with it her former joyous disposition. She seldom played, and laughed more seldom still; but found great comfort in the companionship of the sea, to whose mysterious and fascinating voice she would listen for hours at a time.

As she grew older a great thirst for knowledge manifested itself, and the library of the palace was a true paradise to her curious mind. There her mother found her one day, devouring a volume of Tasso, betraying her emotion in her gleaming eyes and feverish pulse. Centarina lost no time in having all the books taken down and burnt then and there, notwithstanding Malgari's distress.

Giovanni Centarini came to Syra but twice a year, and then only for a few days. At first he had been greatly annoyed by what he called his wife's folly, to which, however, he finally submitted, seeing it was useless to argue with her. Malgari suffered in secret for the estrangement between her parents, and more than once she had begged her mother to resume their former life at the Palace dell'Orto; for, being ignorant of her mysterious origin, she considered their flight from Venice as the humouring of a sick child's fancy. But Centarina had implored her with so many caresses—nay, even tears—not to insist, that the subject was dropped, and life in Syra went on as before.

Malgari was about thirteen years old when a dismissed servant revealed to her, out of spite and vengeance, in what manner she had entered the Centarina household, and how she had been brought by some thief or vagabond. Malgari shuddered, and turned whiter than a pearl, but all she could say was:

"I forgive you."

She hastened to her mother and requested, with the serious firmness of a young queen, to hear the true story in all its details. And, trembling with emotion, Centarina related the beautiful mystery, making the child's lovely pale face light up with heavenly flame, like the first timid streaks of rosy dawn.

"Yes, mother," she murmured, "I feel I am not a vagabond's daughter. I know I must be the pearl, but do not speak of it to anyone—not even to the air that will not turn me yellow—nor to the sea that will never take me back into its cold arms."

And embracing her tenderly, Malgari whispered:

"I should like to return to Venice!"

Towards evening the girl wandered along the seashore until she came to a small creek between some dark rocks, where the waters splashed gently on the fine golden sand.

Malgari's heart swelled with a powerful adoration for her friend the sea, as she stretched herself along the very edge of the water that came to caress her feet and her locks. And the waves were so warm, so tender, so soothing, that in a low, soft tone Malgari began to talk to them, evoking her primitive existence when she was a pearl, opening her heart to the dear motherly waves and begging them to give her once more the sweet, overwhelming joy that had swept over her, one night in Venice, years ago, and again another time while she had been reading the immortal story of Clorinda and Tancredo.

Softly, gently the waves answered, and in their consoling tenderness Malgari felt the magic thrill of her two joys, with the promise of a yet greater happiness to come.

Was she awake or dreaming? The sky was growing dark, but yonder, at the horizon, innumerable silvery lights were rapidly moving towards her. And presently in each one of these lights she could distinguish a human form—fair and dark haired girls swimming in the phosphorescent waters, waving their small hands, that shed a shower of sparks all about them. They did not enter the creek, but passed swiftly before Malgari's enraptured eyes, and their brightness suddenly illuminated the surrounding cliffs, the coast and the woods beyond.

As they swam by, each head turned to gaze at the girl, but not one of these apparitions approached her, until the last of the group, dropping off from her companions, turned into the creek, and stopped at a short distance from the shore.

"Who are you?" asked Malgari.

"Sea nymphs," was the answer.

"Sea nymphs! Oh! then surely you can foretell the future? Won't you tell me mine?"

The little sea nymph looked at her for a moment and said:

"You were born of poetry and of music, and of them you will die."

She had a delicate, childish face, but her eyes were beautiful, deep, and mournful.

"How lovely you are!" said Malgari. "Come and kiss me."

"I dare not. Sea nymphs must never touch the shore."

"Shall we ever meet again?"

"I belong to the sea," sadly answered the dark-haired apparition, "and you are of Heaven."

Without a word of farewell she quickly sank into the water and disappeared on the other side of the rock. Malgari returned to the palace, but did not speak of her encounter, even to her mother.

From that day she ceased to smile, and became even more gentle and more pious. She brought help and consolation to every sufferer on the island. She entered into the dwellings and into the hearts of these poor people, and dwellings as well as hearts were resplendent with her radiance. Many a time in the mild evening hours she returned to her favourite spot between the rocks, but the sea nymphs came no more.

At fifteen, Malgari's beauty and development were those of a woman, and Centarina wondered if it were not time to look out for a suitable match. Giovanni Centarini had not visited them for two years, but his letters arrived at regular intervals, when the vessel *Dei Borsari*, of the Rialto merchants, stopped at Syra on its way to Smyrna. One day, instead of the accustomed missive, came the news that a severe epidemic had broken out in Venice. Centarina was terrified at

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the thought of her husband's peril, and of her own remorse if he were to fall a victim to the plague during her absence, but her terror increased ten-fold when Malgari declared, in resolute yet gentle tones, that it was their duty to return to Venice without delay.

A fortnight later the two women entered their palace, where Giovanni Centarini had breathed his last a few hours before their arrival.

When Centarina's first outbursts of demonstrative grief had somewhat subsided, she suggested that they should leave the city where nought could detain them. Malgari, who had neither wept nor grieved outwardly, replied, that as their father and husband had died in solitude, the sin lay on their shoulders, and had to be atoned for. She had resolved, moreover, to devote herself entirely to the sick of Venice, and to set to work without delay.

The wretched people, who had been forsaken by their nearest relatives—so great was the panic—were left to suffer and die in the streets. Malgari, with her mystic beauty, gentle voice, and skilful hands, that scorned no kind of work, became the ministering angel of rich and poor, who prayed to her and blessed her, calling her La Madonna dell 'Orto.

Among the sufferers stricken by the plague was a young foreign musician, who had come from some northern clime to study his art in the land of the beautiful—a poor, noble, fair youth, whose gratitude, for Malgari's gentle care soon blossomed into a more tender feeling. But the confession that trembled on his lips never found shape in words, for Malgari, with a woman's infallible intuition, had divined his secret, and, deeming that this was not the proper time to speak of love and happiness in the midst of death and suffering, suddenly discontinued her charitable visits.

The Senate loaded her with honours—the Doge did more; he asked her to become his wife. Centarina, in spite of a hundred secret forebodings, in spite of Malgari's cold resistance, was of opinion that one could not refuse a Doge. Still, the girl did refuse him, and, out of mischief, promised to reconsider the matter if the ruler of the Republic consented to give a dowry to all the poor girls of Venice, and to provide for all the beggars. She further demanded that the "Campanile" of the Piazza San Marco be taken down, for she hated it, and if all this were done she would accept his suit.

The Doge readily complied with the first two requests, and pledged himself to fulfil the latter three years after his marriage. Malgari suffered at the thought that her refusal would deprive so many human beings of food, shelter, and happiness, but she still hesitated. Not for long, however. This new sacrifice presented itself as a duty, and as such she accepted it.

At Malgari's request, the nuptials were to be celebrated at the palace on the island of Syra, and, accordingly, the affianced couple left Venice on two of the Republic's vessels, accompanied by their parents, friends, and domestics.

One night, when all on board was still, and the full August moon was shedding its brilliant light on the trembling waters, Malgari, unable to resist the serene glory of the Mediterranean enchantress, crept noiselessly on deck, and was soon lost in admiration. How long she had been listening to the music of the beloved waves she knew not, but she suddenly looked up, and noticed a sailor, who seemed desirous of approaching her, without daring to do so.

Malgari very graciously dispelled his timidity, and soon discovered that he was no other than the foreign youth she had nursed during the plague. This unexpected encounter affected her very deeply, and as she listened to his words of gratitude, for the first time in her life a faint colour stole like a shadow across her pale face. She did not question him as to how he happened to be on the vessel in a sailor's disguise, but made him speak of his native land, and of his life there.

It was some distant country far up in the north, round which a wild sea dashed in summer, and huge blocks of ice floated in winter—a poor, desolate country made of rocks, lakes, and forests of birch trees that, in years of famine, were stripped of their bark to feed the starving people.

"It is a country poor in gold," concluded the youth, "but wealthy with the two most beautiful things on earth: music and poetry!"

Malgari started.

"What makes you say that?" she cried.

And he told her of an immortal poem that the people of this country still sing in the cold winter nights, seated round the cheerful blazing hearth, and in summer when meadows are green and the blue lakes dotted with flowers. It was a poem of love and hate, of strife and peace, of joy and sorrow.

And at last he told her the story of a grand and glorious old man, who was a poet and a king, whose tears falling into the ocean were changed into pearls.

Malgari gazed at the speaker, bathed in moonlight. She listened to the narrative with dilated eyes, clasping her hands on her throbbing heart that was ready to burst with love and anguish.

"Why," she murmured, "Oh, why have I not met you before this?"

Suddenly realising the import of her speech, she turned from him, and sat silently gazing at the waves.

But what was that? There, at the horizon, appeared the floating silvery light, and with it the heads of the sea nymphs. Malgari thought she recognised her own particular maiden in the group.

"Sing," she said to the youth, "sing me the song of the old poet."

When he had brought his instrument, an Italian violin, she concealed herself in a remote corner of the vessel, saying she did not wish to be seen if any one of the party came to look for her. And the stranger sang, putting all the ardour of a patriotic soul into the most sublime strains of music that mortal ears ever listened to. The dolphins, fascinated by his inspired tones, followed the ship. In a few moments the entire deck was crowded with sailors and officers, lords and servants, who stood round him enraptured and entranced, while he sang on without heeding them.

Suddenly becoming aware of their presence, he broke off in some confusion, and rose to pay his respects to Malgari.

She had disappeared, and all he found was her handkerchief steeped in tears. Had she thrown herself into the sea to escape becoming the wife of the Doge? This was the surmise of the dull, senseless crowd.

Poor Centarina died of a broken heart, thinking that her adopted daughter, changed into a pearl, had returned into the mysterious depths of the sea.

But we know better. If nothing was left of Malgari but a handkerchief wet with tears, we know that the pearl had been made of the tears and of the soul of a great poet—we remember the melancholy words of the little sea nymph:

"I belong to the ocean and you to Heaven."

ANTONIO FAGAZZARO.

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FOR HIS MOTHER.

HE first appeared, one cold autumnal day, on our front porch, clothed in rags, with an air of deprecating apology for living, and a wistful roll in his pale blue eyes.

"You ain't got no food to spare, 'ave you?" he remarked in insidious accents, shifting from one bare foot to the other. "Mother's a little way down the road there, and she ain't had nothin' she seemed to fancy to eat lately. But I think a little milk would tempt her. I seed a cow walkin' round here just now, and I thought if she could drink some milk and eat a little somethin', she might feel better. But mother ain't what she used to be. She ain't took much notice of things lately; she don't seem to care for nothin'. Ain't never seen her carry on so."

"Where is your mother?" I asked, interrupting the flow of his confidences. "Are you tramping—er—on foot?"

"Yes-m," he answered, with a sudden change of tone from extreme despondency to one of cheerful alacrity that was quite startling; "yes, we're walking about now, 'cos we was burnt out a little while ago. I say, ain't it pretty country about here?" he added, with the air of a man who is making a tour with every convenience and luxury, and has plenty of leisure time to devote to scenery.

"Mother used to be fond of looking at the fields and the trees and the 'ills before she went blind. I like 'em myself. But she didn't stir out much lately; she just set still in the house, and did the bit of cookin' and tidyin' up there was to be done, before she lost her sight, and after that I waited on her."

"What is your name?" I asked, interested in this strange specimen of humanity.

"My name's Jawn," he answered promptly; "Jawn Bradford. I was christened that, and have allus been called Jawn, so I s'pose it's my name. Never been called anythin' else."

"Well, John," I replied, "if you will come into the kitchen, I will give you some milk for your mother, and we will see what else we can find for her."

John followed me in a brisk but awkward shamble to the back regions, where he was soon made happy by sundry donations in the gastronomic line, which he proceeded to do up in remarkable and pathetic haste.

In fact, he was already departing when I called him back, and suggested his eating something himself before leaving.

"I'll be back here again directly," he remarked in a confidential aside. "I'll just take these things over to mother, and empty out the milk and bring you back the tin can. Yes," he continued, regarding that article with lingering affection, "a tin like this would come handy." Then in a tone of naive reflection: "I don't know as I have a tin to fetch things in, our things were mostly burnt up. Well! A good evenin' to you!" he concluded, with that sudden hilarity of tone which had amused me before, and off he went.

Would he come back, or was it the last of a passing tramp? I wondered, as I turned back to the house with a half qualm as to what Sarah would say when she discovered that one of her kitchen utensils had disappeared, permanently, no doubt.

But I was doing "Jawn" an injustice. The sun was just dipping below the horizon when he returned, bearing the tin can and wearing an expansive smile.

"Mother had a good drink of the milk," he assured me. He also informed me that he had found an old dilapidated cottage in the wood where they purposed to spend the night, and "if mother was feelin' better in the mornin'," he would come over and help me, "if I wanted a job done." To which I assented, and after seeing that he had some supper given him by Sarah, I further braved her displeasure by presenting him with the tin can for which his soul pined.

"Come in!" said a quavering old voice in response to my knock the following morning on the door of a dilapidated cottage buried in the heart of a wood not far from our house.

I entered quickly, the wind slamming the door behind me with angry violence. It was so dark inside that for a moment I could distinguish nothing but a bent form huddled over a little fire of sticks that flickered feebly on the old disused hearth.

The floor was rotten and gave under my foot as I stepped forward and greeted the old crone, who was mumbling to herself there. A sudden flame leapt up and disclosed a countenance mummified by age, and hardly human in its withered aspect. One shrivelled hand grasped a stick on which she leant, and her sightless orbs seemed to gaze at you from out of an illimitable past of suffering and privation. Why, she must have been over a hundred!

Her reply to my inquiry concerning her health was almost unintelligible, but I gathered that she was feeling "bad," though not as poorly as she had been.

Thinking that deeds, not words, would be more to the point, I looked round for something to feed the fire with, and discovered some wood in one corner which John had probably brought in overnight. I soon had a good fire for the poor old creature, who could feel the warmth but not see the cheerful blaze.

The bright flames, which now danced up the chimney, revealed the interior of the hovel in all its dilapidation. Cobwebs hung from the rafters, and a small opening in the wall, stuffed up with rags, was the only indication of a window. It had in former years been used by a keeper, but had long been left to decay.

And the central figure! Barely human—a mere animated bundle of dried skin and bone, crouching in the chimney-corner, and crooning to herself. It was appalling, and I confess to a start when the door opened suddenly to admit, not ghost or goblin, but "Jawn," who came staggering in with a huge bundle of firewood, flooding the hovel for a brief moment with sunshine.

"I've got plenty of wood, that's something" he

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exclaimed, with the delighted accents of a child that has made a discovery. "I seed you comin' across the fields, and stopped to pick up a little more. It takes a lot of wood to keep mother warm. But she's been sleepin' under the 'edges and in sheds lately, and she's got chilled inside I expect."

"I should think so!" I exclaimed faintly. "But I am afraid, John," I continued, "that you won't be able to stay here. I don't know whether you will be allowed to stop, though perhaps I could manage that. But it's so—so bad. We must find you a better lodging than this. It is all falling to pieces."

John rose from stirring the fire, with an air of slightly dampened complacency.

"It does want a little doing to," he remarked with reluctance, "and a winder in it, too. But I can make it do, if they would let us stop. Can't you get 'em to let us stop? Soon as I got mother comfortable, I could begin on it. An' I've got a few cooking things," he added, with a delightful irrelevance. "Had 'em given me round about. If I can ketch a few rabbits about here mother can have 'em for her supper. He—he—he!" and he laughed his queer laugh.

The old creature by the fire stirred at the sound, and worked her mouth round in a very suggestive manner, disclosing a single fang of a tooth in the operation which heightened her witch-like appearance.

"She knows what you're sayin'," John chuckled, jerking his thumb towards her. "She'll be worrying me about that rabbit now till I git one. If I had a trap I could set it to-night."

"I think there is one at home, John. Come over to-day and cut some wood," I remarked, not considering the legality of the matter, "and you can bring back a few things that will make you more comfortable."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Bradford, I am going to send you something I think you will relish for your tea to-night," was all I could find to say, a little later, as I took my leave of this poor remnant of humanity, storm-beaten and buffeted in life's tempest, anchored now for a brief space in a haven that most of us would shudder at and condemn.

Our acquaintance with "Jawn" ripened very quickly, and hardly a day passed that he didn't turn up to do some work. Having held a family conclave on the subject of the Bradfords, and finding that we could easily arrange for them to stay in their present quarters, which John thought a good deal of, a carpenter was sent to mend the floor, stop up the cracks, put glass in the window, and generally patch up the cottage, which only contained two rooms.

I learnt that Mrs. Bradford had refused to go into the workhouse, and that John, poor, simple John, had energetically supported this decision. They had lived somehow until three weeks before I saw them, when their cottage had caught fire. The parish refused further outdoor relief in order to force her to go into the county asylum, and they had set out on a tramp for another home.

The delight of John over these arrangements was perfectly unbounded.

"Why, we're goin' to be just like other people!" he exclaimed with unconscious pathos, when next I saw him. "I've got some shelves put up in the kitchen there, and the chiny your ma give me a-settin' on them. Mother, she went round and felt all the pans and things, and she just laffed! I ain't heard her laff for ever so long," he continued reflectively.

The winter came on quickly, and set in very severe that year. We saw John less frequently, though we heard that he was able to get enough work to keep him going. The old woman, though, from little things that escaped him when he did come, was evidently getting feebler, and as her age was getting buried in the mists of antiquity, it was not to be expected that she could live much longer. That this idea had dawned upon John we finally discovered, though no actual admission of the fact ever escaped him. To keep her alive by every means in his power, to work, beg, borrow, do everything but steal, which he never did, even in his hour of greatest need, was the one thought that possessed him.

Some intensely cold weather made it hard to get about, and we saw nothing of our *protégés* for some time. Then one night came a heavy snowstorm, and becoming anxious as to their condition, we decided next day to brave the elements and go and see them. So, in goloshes and an Arctic outfit generally, we made our way across the fields to the little cottage.

As we neared the door, deep groans and convulsive sobs told their own tale. The feeble flicker of life had gone out with the storm, and in the darkness of the winter night the soul of the old woman had fled. We could only be glad that a great human love had sustained her to the last.

After the funeral it was proposed that John should come and live with us and work on our farm, but nothing could induce him to leave a spot so full of associations.

"I seem to see her sittin' there in front of the fire," he would say, nodding his head slowly up and down. "It don't seem to be true for her not to be there."

But the impossible had happened to the poor fellow, and when the iron of that truth had fully entered into his soul it was the laying of the axe to the root of the tree.

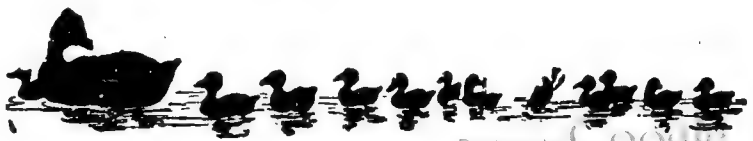
A perfect dismemberment of his whole being seemed to take place. He would neither eat nor sleep. Nothing would comfort him and no argument could reach him. He would sit staring into vacancy by the hour, the house uncared for and the food which the neighbours brought him left untouched.

And when he did rouse himself sufficiently to take nourishment and go about his work once more, we all saw by the look in his face that the beginning of the end had come.

So the winter wore away and the spring was upon us, and "Jawn" grew more gaunt and wretched with each succeeding day of budding tree and blossom.

And when Nature had clothed herself in all the glory of her maturity his summons came, and mother and son were together once more.

FRANCIS WALKER.



The Tale of the Yellow War.

BY M. P. SHIEL.

Author of "The Man-Stealers," "Prince Zaleski," "Shapes in the Fire," "The Rajah's Sapphire," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Chinese Scream.

The French invasion was two-fold, one-quarter of the Italian Chinese crossing into the Gulf of Lyons to Cette by towed floats, and so along the canal from Cette, across the narrow part of France, to where the canal meets the Garonne near La Reole, and then to the Gironde and the Biscay coast. This horde, with half the French horde proper, making altogether twenty millions, were to be British.

So it happened that, while the French horde proper were pouring through Belgium by Verviers, Liège, Namur, and Charleroi, pressing towards the practically unfortified northern frontier of France between Maubeuge and Rocroy, at Hirson, five million Italian Chinese had already decimated the western sea-board, and had been organised into stores-collecting and barge, raft, lighter, and tug-collecting and constructing brigades.

All behind these two invading hordes what resistance there had been was over, with the exception of some half-dozen detached strongholds, whose garrisons were gradually yielding to famine; and everywhere to the east and north of France, again with some exceptions, was the unsparing pigtail. These exceptions were Hungary, Turkey, Lapland, and Finland. For in Europe, the Mongolian invaders found some twenty-seven millions of Mongolian inhabitants already there, and it was one of the purposes of that great inventor and consummate statesman, Yen How, that these should be left alive to form (the Hungarians especially) the nucleus of a new civilisation, which was to be neither like the old western, nor like the old eastern, and like nothing in the world save something which *he*, Yen, had quite definitely mapped out in his own wide space of brain.

The western sweep of the Yellow Wave had, in fact, been slightly swelled by some hundreds of thousands of European Turks and Magyars.

Near Charleroi was made what was practically the last battle-field stand of Continental Europe. The Elysée, with rash pride, had issued a manifesto to the people of France, inviting all who could not fly to give in their names as fighters at *bureaux* established in various quarters of various cities. To this call 200,000 French youths and old men responded, and an untrained army, of which the last residues of the Reserve of the Territorial Army formed the nucleus, set forth to hurl themselves upon the infinite.

It was computed that each fighting European destroyed, one way and another, thirty yellow men. But could the arm of each, dead weary of slaughter, have destroyed three hundred, or three thousand, still the effort would have been wasted. Over the carcases of a thousand dead straggled a million living. To shoot the vagabond Atlantic with cannon is a mockery of one's self.

The garrison of Paris remained; but the occupation of the French capital, supposed to be impossible to any other army, was, though bloody in its accomplishment, not extremely difficult to this.

A corps and a half, making nearly twice the number which, in its palmiest days, had inhabited the city of light and joy, sat down along the northern valley of the Seine, their lines occupying a length from the Achères-Poissy railway-line to the Forêt de Bondy, well beyond the outer *ceinture* of fortifications composed of great strongholds such as Cormeilles, Franconville, Cotillons, Montmorency, Domon.

The first care of the besiegers was to isolate the city; and in every direction, during one night, all the lines of railway radiating from the centre were blown up along a distance of some score of yards.

Then at once with light siege train, a brigade was thrown forward, and an attack began upon St. Germain-en-Laye.

Precisely what was the thought of the French general, what his ultimate hope, in making his determined resistance is not known. But a determined resistance he did make. Such had always been the splendid desperation, the tragic pride, of France.

The Chinese, on their part, might very well have drawn lines round the entire outer *ceinture*, and waited there, till all the cats and dogs of Paris and its villages had been

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eaten; but this no longer suited their mood. The yellow man, in his senses is, indeed, afraid of cannon. But the entire race was by this time no longer in its senses; here was a people dancing mad, gorged with gore, flushed with victory, greedy of agonies. Fear they no longer knew. To celebrate for ever a jubilee of devils in a scarlet world—to raise ever higher monuments built of human corpses, and shriek and dance around them—to live, to roll, to die in red—this was their sole remaining instinct.

General Saussier, sitting at St. Cloud with his staff, received telephonic message from St. Germain:

"Chinese are being mown down by thousands, but still they come."

And half-an-hour later by telegraphic click-clack from the mighty seven-battery Fort de Marly:

"Strong assault by Chinese. No. 2 redoubt carried by gangways and scaling-ladders in teeth of guns. Loss of enemy immeasurable."

And an hour later from St. Cyr:

"Chinese now swarming over glacis. Battery in rear carried. Ammunition cannot, I fear——"

No more. So southward, and eastward spread the tale of huge carnage, of steady, rabid advance. By nightfall of the first day of siege, St. Germain, Marly, St. Cyr, Versailles, Châtillon, had fallen.

It was on the next morning, at the hour when the sun should have been seen to rise, that men were first startled by a continuance of the darkness of the night.

The secret of this phenomenon was, of course, unknown at the time. In England, presently, it was given out by the scientists that some monstrous thing had happened, probably in some region of the South Sea—some unparalleled passion of Nature—which had poured over the earth in inconceivable mass its scoriac and tufaceous particles and multiform volcanic ashes, darkening the day. That some new properties were present in the atmosphere could not be doubted; for at the same time an intolerable oppression settled upon the chest, and, perhaps by reflex action, down sank the spirits of men; the mind of the children assumed the garb of crape and sackcloth which the Mother had put on; and an awe, and a charnel horror, and a *fear*, such as the heart had never yet known, gripped it now.

In England, it may be presumed, this unutterable pall of gloom lay much less heavily upon the imagination; for here the Chinese and their reign of terror were a mere inconceivable nightmare, not a present fact. But in England, too, the universal nerve felt the strangeness, and the thrill, of that ghastly obscurity.

It was ghastly, because it was not complete. Utter gloom would have been more tolerable. Toward noon, during all the week, the sun was not wholly hidden, but appeared as a garish blotch of leprous lavender, giving nothing that could be called light, making only the darkness visible; while, as if to vie in chromatic hideousness, the moon appeared one night for an hour as a hollow, black eye-socket, with a rim of pallid green, and then disappeared.

One lifted a club to smite a head.

The sickly gloom of the daytime was just sufficiently relieved to enable near objects to be discerned by the troubled eyes, while distances were lost in unrelieved blackness.

The event at Timor, by which the entire island was destroyed, was of so extraordinary a character that positively the whole planet, with the exception of some parts of America, may be said to have been infected by the catastrophe. Nagasaki disappeared, with many of the inland towns of Japan; a tidal wave inundated a large tract of the Kimberley district of Australia; Vesuvius plumed her cones with a rufous fume of lurider red; and old Ætna, purring and stuttering her thunders, broke into strange and gruff garrulity. Over Europe, from the Mull of Oe to the Urals, there was an almost continuous, just perceptible quaking of the ground, which nowhere broke out into violence, nowhere did damage, yet was remarkable for its menacing continuity, its unparalleled universality.

Not a breath stirred the air.

If beneath such a sky, and upon such a quaking earth we could really conceive "the Chinese scream," we should then really understand the speedy delirious deaths of the few successful fugitives from Europe during that week of apocalyptic woes.

At Auxonne, in the Place d'Armes, where there stands a statue of Napoleon I., the whole remaining population assembled, on the irruption of the yellow man, almost filling the open space, and fell to their knees with clasped hands, waiting. They only knew the nearness of the Chinese, who always and everywhere, ran noiselessly, barefooted, or in soft shoes, when the sudden scream at the glimpse of the crowded victims burst upon their ears.

One of the terrors of this massacre, and of others, was the uncertainty as to which sort of death any given victim might die; one of the horrors was, that whatever death a Chinaman inflicted, he loudly imitated with his lips, in an instructive way, the nature of the death. They came pelting in their swinging run, into the *Place* at Auxonne, and as one lifted a club to smite a head, he screamed inarticulately;

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and as the club fell, he cried "Shrash!" And as another caught a flying child by the heels, he screamed inarticulately; and as he swung the frail skull against the base of the statue, he cried, "Pop!" And as another aimed his pistol at a near man, he screamed inarticulately; and as the pistol went off, he cried "Bam!" And as another seized a woman from behind by her hair, he screamed inarticulately; and as he danced and jumped upon her crushed body, he cried "Wash!"

A very large proportion of the populations of Europe had been absolutely unable to fly; many had not had time, when the Chinese were upon them; many, with infinite effort, had reached the coast to find no craft there to bear them away. Roughly speaking, about one half, calling upon the rocks and caves to cover them, remained; many, as at Auxonne, shut up in fortified towns. For a time the darkness of day and night enabled many to hide about the country; but it is doubtful if any considerable number could have owed a final escape to this means.

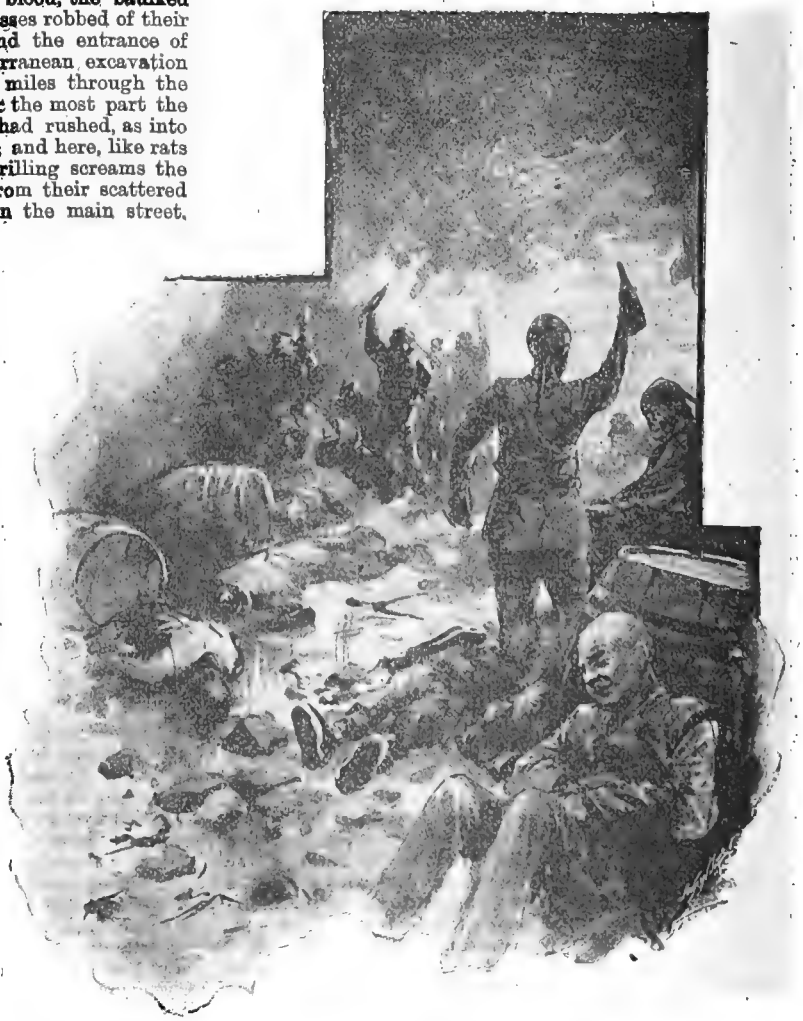
At Epernay, half a regiment having entered the town toward night—though between day and night there was small distinction now—went marauding with flaring torches into every house, searching for victims and finding few. The streets were empty—the inhabitants had vanished. In this surprising famine of blood, the baulked hordes poked furiously about, like tigresses robbed of their young. At last a party, ferreting around the entrance of M. Moët's cellars, discovered the subterranean excavation which extends in vast vaults some nine miles through the chalky rock of this region. Hither for the most part the doomed people, in unreflecting panic, had rushed, as into the last hole left on earth to cover them; and here, like rats in a trap, they were caught. With thrilling screams the Chinese, at the signal, ran swinging from their scattered search about the town, toward Moët's in the main street. It had been drizzling all the day, and their feet were dabbled to the knees with the soft clay of the neighbouring hill of Montigny, of which was made the Epernay earthenware; so that within an hour, the long ramifications of the ransacked excavations were a filth of dabbled gore and mud.

The vaults contained several millions of bottles, with from four to five thousand pipes of the best champagne; and here at this depth of forty feet below the streets, in the midst of this gloom relieved by rare lurid flares, there was transacted so red an orgy of massacre, screaming lust, and sighing drunkenness, so mixed a drama of filthy infamy and sabbatic Satanism, as earth, and perhaps hell, never saw. In the matter of crime, the yellow man is ingenious; what we cannot conceive, he can do; so that where we end he begins, his natural talent being for the grotesque and the *macabre*. And when the orgy grew still for very surfeit, when there welled from him the sigh of perfect peace, down dropped his head upon its pillow of flesh, and his snoring breath fanned the hair of the naked dead.

Simultaneously, the other wine-vaults of Epernay were invaded; and, above, too, the streets were strewn with dead and drunken. The town was burnt down before the night was over, some thousands of Chinamen perishing in the flames.

As for the Parisian corps and a half, fort after fort of the outer *ceinture* glutted their monstrous batteries with carnage, and yielded. At Meudon two gallant companies of *chasseurs à pied* flung themselves down an escarpment to hurl back an assault with scaling-ladders; they hurled back the assault, and were literally trampled under foot by the swarm of on-coming multitudes. Then it was the turn of Mont Valerien. Bouviers fell, de Buc, Bois d'Arcis. At Satory every siege-gun of the Japanese was uncarriaged, and the fort was only taken by the sheer powerlessness of the great guns any longer to keep range with their mangled rifling. Issy fell. At Châtillon the whole stock of ammunition was exhausted in slaughter. Vanves fell, Ivry fell, Montrouge fell. Nearer and nearer closed in the inevitable crowding circle. The Chinese were at St. Cloud, at Putoux, at Suresnes, and at Sèvres.

Even while the war was raging round southern forts they came screaming through the Porte de St. Cloud, and went swarming into the Bois up the Allée de Longchamp, making for the Porte Maillot which gives direct access to the city. The iron-barred gate was closed, and the foremost, pressed forward by the now disorganised mob behind, fainted and perished in the block. Still onward surged the crowd, trampling itself in frantic, blind rage into a ghastliness



An orgy of massacre and sighing drunkenness as earth never saw.

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of heaped-up death, while the *gendarmerie* which lined the walls sent whistling gusts of lead through the trees upon the ever-advancing hosts. Then a stream of Chinese extricated themselves sideways, and with a half turn to the right sought to make through the trees for the fosse, and so

They hurled back the assault.

for the fortifications. And as they turned, they fell; and others following, turned and fell. And now, the whole current began to tend in the way of these pioneers. Forward they are pressed, and press, and fall; but they fall ever nearer to the fosse; and now they are falling *into* it; and down through the wide, ever-filling ditch they press, treading upon a carpet of dead flesh only; and now there is no more a fosse, but a level floor of bodies; and across this they rush, and attempt to climb, and fall; and the level floor is no more level, but slants upward to the parapet; and along this sure gangway of soft and sinking luxury, this vast snake-nest of intermixing pigtails, they press, they run; now they cannot fail; they gain the parapet; they scream; and Paris is Gomorrah.

The mystery of license to which, during all that week of black horror, the chief of the cities of men was a prey, can only be hinted here. It was well understood that Paris was to be the capital of the new Chinese world; and it was therefore with a certain feeling of old proprietorship that the Chinese entered it. They dealt with the inhabitants as a man, returning from a long journey, makes short work of an accumulation of rats in his chief cellar.

They stormed in a solid body up the wide Avenue de la Grande Armée, and also in two solid bodies, right and left, just within the fortifications. Near l'Etoile, stretching right across the breadth of the avenue, and also across the Boulevard de Berthier, there were barricades of the Garde Municipale, and street-fighting, and massacre, and mounds of trampled yellow corpses. But the flood behind swept onward the flood before with the inevitableness of the ocean-tide. Within a few hours all that length of thoroughfares which the Parisians call the "*boulevards extérieurs*" were occupied; and the inhabitants were driven inward like wild horses within a ring of prairie-fire.

Another host had entered south by the Porte d'Ivry into the 13th arrondissement, another from Montrouge by the Porte d'Orléans into the 14th; and now, swarming in their millions, they infested the ways and bye-ways of the city, its squares and its bed-rooms, its stables and its public buildings, with glad rage, with prying Bacchic stare, with gaping mouth.

Here was the New Pekin.

The bony visage of the yellow man, in moments of unbridled lust and mad excitement, is a brutal spectacle. The countenance is a travesty; the divine image becomes a mask of hellish farce. It is as though a panting skeleton played a comedy. There all is seen—the nakedness of the passions, the bare, rampant hideousness; the face becomes an indecency. What added to the frenzy of these riots was the fact that among the invaders were sweating women, crazy with heat and dust, and the instinct of blood, and the ultimate wantonness of crime.

On the night of the entry, on each of the iron railings in the wide space of the Place de la Concorde glared an impaled head. At the Invalides, in the circular pit where lies the tomb of Napoleon, there lay a compact mass of bodies reaching to the level of the railings; and on this bed of mortality lay a score of Chinese men and women in exhausted sleep.

Here, too, was subterranean massacre in catacomb and *égout*. On the Quai St. Michel a body of fifty Quartier Latin students stood waiting in proud, pale, silent patience, holding hands, and died smiling.

While the city from La Vellette to Boulogne was still one shrieking Sodom, Yen How arrived in Paris.

Though eager to be away to the coast, he had come hither to inaugurate a Ceremony, which was to be memorable. This was on the Tuesday of the sunless week.

He lost no time. He summoned to him at the Elysée captains and generals of brigades, and commanded them to make ready the people for the long-predetermined Ritual.

To-day he was no more Yen How, the General, he was Yen How, the Prophet-Priest.

He had with him the Chiam, the hereditary high priest, counting an Aaronic ancestry of a thousand years; he had with him a gorgeous retinue of bouzis; he had with him the idol of Quanheim, the Chinese Virgin, sitting among cushions in rich robes—the idol of Matsoa, who swam from a far country to China through many seas in one night—the idol of Quonin, Virgin of the North—the idol of Fe, the eagle-headed joss—the idol of Minifo—the idol of many-handed Puffa—many idols; he had with him the books of Confucius, and the books of Tansin; and he draped himself in the robes and solemn gauds of the Arch-Priest, that he might inaugurate and set up in one central Temple of the West the religion of the East.

He chose Nôtre Dame.

And the work of torture, and infamy, and slaughter, now nearly over, ceased; and on that day, the people flocked toward the Cité, and that ancient church of Christ.

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Never was assembled such a multitude within a city. To lend the last impressiveness to the ceremony, Yen How had ordained that these should be the sole public idols, for the time being, brought over from China. A Chinaman without idols is like an opium-smoker without opium. This gorgeous ritual, therefore, was in itself quite sufficient, once for all, to fix and establish Paris as the centre of the new Empire. In the earlier hours of the day messages were everywhere flashed over the Continent, and to China, stating the exact hour of the Inauguration; and at that hour, account having been taken of differences of longitude, by far the greater portion of the yellow race bowed its muttering head, prostrated itself, and turned a jaundiced eye to Heaven.

Yen How, with thick ivory ring on thumb, arrayed in a blaze of colours, was borne in open palanquin

He began to kill scientifically.

of gold all along the Rue de Rivoli and by the Pont de l'Arcole through the kneeling throng, proceeded by thousands of bouzis, bearing the majestic god Fo and the huge-bellied, broadfaced Gan.

The line of route was illuminated with the myriad variegation of lanterns, as was also the interior of Nôtre Dame. While everywhere, from Montmartre to Montrouge, a noise of jangling bells rang through the sombre air. At the hour of the sacrifice, steaming human heads were offered to Matsoa, as a variation on the usual boiled heads of the pig.

In the tiny shrines which, on three sides, surround the nave, where pricket-candlesticks and rich, religious *decor* had long represented the rather foppish religiosity of the Parisian "*dévote*," were set up the statues of grotesque and grinning josses. The Crucified gave place to Fo, and the Immaculate to Quanheim.

The studied pomp of this memorable Hegira was simply overwhelming in its effect. The prostrate multitudes groaned in inward agonies of veneration; and the God of their veneration was, in reality, Yen How.

When the sacred books were opened and solemnly presented, it was not forgotten that Confucius, who wrote them, was mysteriously *there*, in carnal presence, before their favoured eyes.

He, for his part, the little doctor—even in that grandiose hour of his triumph—smiled inwardly, as usual. In all the sun and earth there was hardly heat to melt that ice.

Only where the focussed rays of Self touched the secret spot, he warmed, and flowed, and felt.

The pageant of Inauguration was at two. By four the broken Paris-Calais railway was repaired, and Yen How with his retinue set off westward.

Already Paris presented a strange sight, apart from the heaps of dead in the streets, and the bodiless heads and arms with which the screaming Chinese played ball. She looked Chinese. The Mongolian race, like the English, can adapt itself readily. All the winding length of the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré was, in two days, bright with gauds

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and hues. Shops had been appropriated by individuals, who made haste to find pigments to daub the legend in characters which seemed to grin. Lanterns were hung out. The gay city assumed another tone of gaiety: vermilion on her houses, and vermilion in her streets.

The work of blood recommenced.

At Marseilles, the Chinese, entering by the Boulevard de la Madeleine, found a deserted city, filled with the roar of the famishing animals at the Zoological Gardens. Their only prey was the very aged, and a number of nuns, medical men and invalids, collected chiefly at the New Hospital. In their squeeze to get at these a number of Chinese were crushed to death.

At Lyons an incredible *mêlée*, made up of the madmen of the hospital of *Antiquaille*, of Chinese, and of Sœurs de la Charité, raged for an hour through the vast, straggling building. Beneath the Pont de la Mulatière there occurred a block of corpses which spread gradually upward between the banks of the Saône; and this, within two days, aided by the stifling heat of the stagnant and sunless air, resulted in a pestilence among the invaders. At once the dying men were seized with the instinct to rush northward toward Paris, the home of the gods; and it was only the promptness of Yen How, who ordered the clearage of the river, and the instant shooting of every sick Chinaman, which presented more widespread disaster.

At old Valence, where some failure of commissariat —caused by the deportation southward of provisions, and the voluntary destruction of the vineyards—had occurred, there was scarcity for a day, and food in plenty the next. The low hedge that divides the yellow man from omnivorousness was in Europe found to be very low indeed—where the flesh of men is not yellow, but pink, like the newborn mouse. At the first spur of hunger, the hedge was leapt with an easy bound.

For a day hard Scarcity; the next, flesh in plenty—roast and sodden, bake and stew.

Meanwhile, if there was a man in Europe who had a strong will neither to be eaten when dead, nor tortured alive at slow fires, nor shot with arrows, nor pierced with bullets, nor pulped with the clubs which the Chinese use for pounding rice—that man was the duellist Edrapol.

Thrice had he been caught, and thrice he had escaped.

He reached Dieppe, and for the second time within two days, he had no sooner reached his point of aim than the irruption came.

He ran at the first breathless news of the Chinese approach down to the basins; and, with the crowd of hunted men and women around him, he saw the last little boat making her way, crowded with people, out of the mouth of the outer basin.

He had forgotten, in his mad haste, both sword and pistols; and as he saw all hope cut off by way of the sea, his first instinct was to rush back, and get what was like life to him—a weapon in his hand.

Even as he ran through the street, along which men and women were rushing in wild-eyed distraction, he heard *The Scream*. It had reached Dieppe.

Edrapol stopped, and gazed crazily about. His big soft felt hat was pressed back hard on his head; the long hanging ends of his white moustache shook. It was not a moustache—it was a drapery.

Here was a stern end to an existence of pleasure; here an absence of all punctilio intruding itself upon a life which had made punctilio its bride. The Chinese slew without "seconds" or ceremony; though the aggressors, they chose their own weapons. The trifler's heart sank within him.

Round he leered, standing a moment in the third position, as if to parry the *tierce* thrust—his hat pressed hard back on his head.

The Scream came from a side street; it was very near; his inn was before him; he flew forward.

He reached the deserted house, rushed up the stairs to a room, and dropped to his knees before a portmanteau. From his arsenal of weapons he chose a six-chambered revolver and a dainty rapier. With these in his hand he felt better.

He stood and listened, his beard, his whole body, shaking.

In about a minute, the place was filled with noise, shouted gibberish, shrill laugh. Edrapol bolted his door.

But it was soon discovered, and battered in with clubs. About ten Chinese, hot, crazy, bent upon blood, rushed in upon him, screaming.

But this time they reckoned without their host. A man does not acquire a European reputation for nothing.

Edrapol put his legs into the exact pose of elegance suited to the occasion, and with the revolver in his left hand and the rapier in his right, he began to kill scientifically. Every shot entered the middle of a heart or brain, and every stroke failed not to sever the intended artery. The last pig-tail dropped upon the writhing corpses of his fellows, and Edrapol leant a little on the handle of his dripping rapier, the model of grace.

It was near sunset then, about two weeks before the dark time.

He crept from the chamber. The house was empty. He found a recess in a wine-cellar, in which he hid till three the next morning.

The house was then full of other Chinese, and the corpses of white women; but the living were as unconscious as the dead, drunk with the orgie of the day. Edrapol passed through them, and made his escape from the town eastwards and southwards.

For a week he lurked in a little empty farm-house between Dieppe and St. Valéry; and then some Chinese came to the farm-house; but Edrapol escaped.

For another week he seems to have dodged and lurked about in that neighbourhood, near the shore, in the vain hope of somehow getting away in a ship. But no ship came.

He was carrying about with him a piece of cheese which he found at the farm-house, and this, with occasional autumn hedge-fruit, appeased his hunger. He remembered the bon-bons of Moissier with regret.

Unexpectedly, one midnight, walking along the beach, he came upon a broken hut, and near it a small seamy skiff, containing half an oar. He was just able to move her; and after three hours' work, got her to the water's edge.

He put off in her, and as the water oozed in, he baled it with his voluminous hat. When he was not baling, he paddled.

His notion of reaching England in this fashion was hopeless; but the old duellist, the luxurious *boulevardier*, clung to life with the desperation of a pampered woman. And he fell upon his feet where another would have failed.

On the third morning, he was picked up, half dead, by a barque, almost in mid-channel. She was the *Conrad*, which had borne Hardy to Nagasaki; and was then, for the first time, on her way to England. So that, late that night, Edrapol's glittering fingers pulled the patriarchal tassels of his moustache on Newhaven broken wharf. And there he examined the edge of his rusted rapier.

(*To be continued.*)

For the first time in the history of British journalism a serial story of a war is running concurrently with the actual fighting.

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THE TUG-OF-WAR.

A smart phaeton came rapidly down the avenue, and, dexterously driven, turned into one of the side streets and pulled up before a house. The sudden quiet after the pounding of the hoofs attracted the attention of a man walking, and he looked absently at the woman who was being assisted to alight, while a trim footman stood at the horses' heads.

In an instant his expression changed, and he quickened his steps, reaching the woman as the phaeton was driven off.

"Miss Reddington!"

At the sound of his voice, the woman stopped at the steps, and for the first time saw the man, whose face was alight with expectancy and eagerness.

"Mr. Crofton! What a surprise; and how delightful!" She put out both hands. "Really, this is charming; but what did you call me?"

"It was horribly formal, was it not? But it is so long ago, I was afraid! May I begin where we left off?" His voice was as persuasive as ever, she decided, and the fascination was the same, yet her tone was quizzical when she answered:

"It sounded so strange, you know! But you will come in, of course; you must!"

At the door she hesitated a moment, and then spoke to the butler who was turning away.

"I shall not see anyone this afternoon, Edmonds," and continued to Crofton:

"I am going to take you up to the library; it is much more comfortable, and you must stay the rest of the afternoon and talk over old times."

Silently the man followed her up the stairs, his mind filled with the strangeness of the meeting. Thirteen months since he had seen her, and then to run across her in this unexpected way and find her unchanged! At least, so it seemed. Women are deceitful creatures, yet in some respects transparent enough, as he had reason to know, owing to a style of convincing that dissipated any difficulty in discovering the state of their feeling towards him, which, if he had chosen to make it so, was of a kind that justified a flattering opinion of himself. Occasionally, it is true, there was a rebuff, but that only stimulated further effort that resulted in his complacently repeating to himself a certain French proverb about "the one who knows how to wait." This time he had waited in accordance with the dictates of experience, and the result was at hand. The thought pleased him.

In the library the woman stopped.

"Now we shall not be disturbed," she said, smiling. "Mrs Van Nuyster is not at home. Isn't it fine? *Voilà!*"

She dropped in a big chair and began pulling off her boa, and Crofton took her hand and gently unfastened the glove.

"I never was more surprised than to see you so unexpectedly. You are not changed!"

"To you, no! But fancy my astonishment! I did not expect to see you here."

"I? Oh, I'm stopping with my friends—my dearest friends—the Van Nuysters."

She was spreading out her fingers and closing them, a habit she had after taking off gloves, and Crofton watched her while she talked on.

"That was Mr. Van Nuyster I was driving with. I wish you had met him. He is charming!"

"Ah," Crofton said deliberately, "his wife must have great confidence in you!"

"Why not? I trust you do not think it misplaced!" She took the long pins out of her hat and flung it on a chair. "Suppose we leave the Van Nuysters alone. Accept the good the gods send you; that is, if you regard it so!"

"The 'good' meaning you, I do; but it makes me hate your host when I know what a delightful afternoon he has had, while I——"

"But here is the rest of it for you. What more can you desire?"

"I don't like leavings; I want the first."

"Oh, of course," the woman said teasingly; "you would be first in the minds, first in the souls, first in the hearts of women!

"'Woman' stands for 'women' in many cases! Well, where have you been all these months? Fancy how long ago since we met—parted, rather; yet now it seems like yesterday."

"A long yesterday as I look back upon it," he said moodily; "but now," with an almost imperceptible accent, "I shall expect compensation. How long have you been here?"

"All the winter. I love this great city, you know, and I shall stay until spring."

"You must 'love' the Van Nuysters to stay with them so long," he remarked doubtfully.

"But I do! Mrs. Van Nuyster is a dear; the sort of woman you like," she added, "and Mr. Van Nuyster—well, he is the sort of man *I* like. I hope you will come and see me often; they make my friends very welcome! You will be asked to dine, I know; I will speak to Mr. Van Nuyster about it."

Crofton stiffened himself. "Ah," he said meaningly, "Mr. Van Nuyster. I do not accept men's invitations to dine at their wives' tables."

"Naturally, but it will be the wife who will invite you. You will come?" Her voice pleaded charmingly. Crofton thought, and the moment was his. To recognise the moment and seize it was among his talents, and one is apt to do well what one enjoys. Mentally he collected his forces.

"Esther, what is Mr. Van Nuyster to you?"

"My dear friend." She was smoothing out her gloves and avoided looking at him.

"Ah, and I fancied, fool that I am, that it was I that you thought of. Heaven knows you should, to make things just."

"And your wife?" she asked softly.

"What is she to me except the bearer of my name? The thought makes me hate her. It prevents my giving it to you if you would have it. But it cannot prevent my loving you, and you only." He was leaning over her until his lips almost brushed her hair. "Esther, have you nothing to say to me?"

"I—I am astonished," she said weakly, when he broke in:

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"Dear heart, you must have known it. We cannot evade Fate or lie about it; that will not help us."

"Ah, no," she whispered.

Crofton took her hands gently. "Esther, I love you so; will you be patient with me? You could not realise, dear, how the first time I saw you, there crept into my heart a joy that was almost a pain; but when I knew, and there took possession of me a hope that has never left, for sometimes I fancied you knew and were proud of my love, though you made no sign and trusted to my honour not to speak, and I respected your confidence."

He bowed his head until it just touched her hands, and, as though the contact encouraged him, continued:

"There are women, dear, for whom a man would barter everything, fame and honour, and all he has held most precious, and you are more to me than all those, though if Fate had not brought us together to-day I should have kept away and tried to live my lonely life without you. You believe me, Esther?"

"Yes," the woman muttered.

"But having found you again, I cannot let you go. Do not tell me there are obstacles; there need be none if you love me."

The woman sprang out of her chair.

"You must not," she exclaimed. "Do not make it impossible for me to see you again. Let us be friends. Ah, think of your wife!"

"Have I not thought of her for ten long years? Can the memory ever depart, I wonder? Esther, will you take me into the warmth of your love and let us forget everyone in the world but ourselves?"

"Mr. Crofton, I want to be friends with you——"

"Friends!" he interrupted scornfully.

"Though after to-day probably you will not want to see me again; but first," she turned and faced him squarely, "I want to tell you that, with one exception, I believe nothing of what you said—that is if 'Fate' had not thrown me in your way to-day, you would have kept away. I do think that, because you simply would never have thought of me. It sounds discourteous; I am sorry, and much to blame for letting you go on as I did, but the temptation was too great. You have won a bet for your wife."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I like your wife, Mr. Crofton, and from the bottom of my heart I pity her. You are charming to talk to, delightful always, but to marry—*ah, c'est autre chose!* She is plucky, too, one never hears a complaint or a murmur, and she philosophically takes what life offers and does not pine for the unattainable. Decidedly, she is to be admired! You may be surprised how well she knows you. That is what I mean about the wager, for one day she wagered that you would say you loved me madly. She had no feeling about it, and I was never so astonished in my life, but she said she did not mind any more—one got used to anything. Yet, poor soul, people say she loved you devotedly when you married her."

The man seemed to have lost the power of speech, the turning of the tables bade fair to crush him, and the woman went on:

"I am sorry all this happened, because I wanted to have you among my acquaintances, yet the fault is mine for I could have prevented it; instead, I encouraged you, tacitly, it is true, but encouraged you all the same. I am like all women, though you have called me unique: we like to have men's devotion and attention.

"You are simply an extreme, for if a woman be clever enough to interest you, then you are seized with a desire to make her believe she is your affinity. You say unutterable things just looking into a woman's eyes, and a pressure of your hand seems to imply life-long devotion. You are one of the most charming men I ever met, and quite the most sincere!"

A little vein about Crofton's mouth, invisible usually, was deep blue, a sign always of intense anger, and he stood confronting the woman.

"Miss Reddington————"

"Ah, that is a mistake. Evidently you have not heard. I am Mrs. Van Nuyster."

"You!"

"Yes. I was engaged at the time I knew you—over a year ago—but it was not announced till two months ago, and we were married just after. I am that creature of composite newness known as a bride!"

"You!" he repeated. "I hope your deception about your friend amused you!"

She laughed a little at the recollection.

"It was a deception—but true, too. They are my dearest friends, and you would like Mr. Van Nuyster." She went a step nearer him. "I thought you would like Mrs. Van Nuyster," she said doubtfully.

For a second the man hesitated, but genius, he recollected, was equal to occasions. "If she will let me."

"She will be delighted to. Mr. Crofton, will you understand when I say that, if I thought you meant what you had said this afternoon, I should never offer you my friendship. The combination would be impossible. But you were simply trying to—to—what shall we call it? Nothing. But don't try again, and let us be friends. Here is my hand on it."

"Thank you," said Crofton gravely. "I am truly honoured. May I kiss my friend's hand in token of fealty?" He touched it lightly with his lips. "And will you excuse me now and let me come again?"

"My friend will always be welcome, and I want you to meet my husband. You must dine with us as soon as we have a free evening. I shall send Mr. Van Nuyster to look you up. You will accept his invitation to his wife's table? Ah, that was too bad! Forgive me! Do!"

"There is nothing to forgive, and while life lasts I am in your debt."

"Between friends there is no question of debt; it is only with acquaintances one compares accounts." She touched the bell. "I shall not say good-bye, but—*au revoir!* When you dine with us, you will bring your wife." And Crofton passed beween the portieres as the maid pulled them apart.

A moment later Mr. Van Nuyster entered.

"I met someone just going out," he said.

"Yes. I am sorry you were not here before. Or, no, for that would have prevented a most artistic finale!"

"Meaning?" he asked, kissing her.

"Meaning," she mimicked, laying both hands on his shoulders, "that he thought himself madly in love and was telling me about it."

"With you?"

"Dear Van, with himself! His regard for Ego would prevent an inconvenient passion for anyone else and be his safeguard."

"But he might be able to make the woman think differently."

"Then she would be a fool."

"True; which you cannot comprehend. But you are a clever woman, Esther!"

"Thank you, dear," she said softly. "Perhaps the lesson will do him good and make life more happy for his wife," she added.

H. ORMOND.

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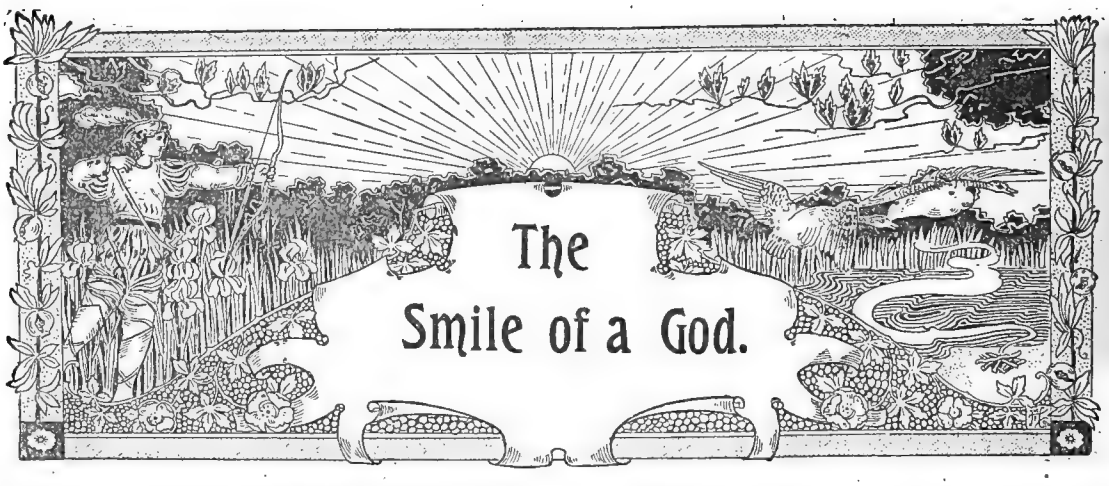

The Smile of a God.

A sensitive man has no business in the desert. He will get prodded everywhere. If he takes offence at rough banter, Heaven help him when he gets into a mining-camp. If he wears his heart upon his sleeve, let him steer clear of the Mexican towns and the pretty señoritas. If he would know any peace, let him keep away from the cattle-range, for the cow-boys' jests are as keen and cutting as the spurs at their heels.

Frank Robbins was beginning to find out some of these things. But if you gave him a whole decade he would not find them all out.

"What the boy wants is toughening," said Mart Selby.

Mart was big and tough, and he saw no good reason why anybody but a child or a woman should be tender.

"He's a young colt that wants a Mexican bit shoved into his mouth, and then be ridden through the cactus."

At Lucin's ranch the boys joked and irritated Robbins, but it did not seem to toughen him. They cared nothing for whisky that didn't scratch as it went down, and when he put water in his they called him a perfect lady and laughed loudly.

"Stand their joking," said Mart to Robbins, "and you'll get along better. They'll always make it hot for a man that don't joke back."

"Oh, I don't mind it," replied Robbins, badly overdoing his effort to look unconcerned.

It had been the same everywhere he had been in the West. He was one of those men who are never anything but tender-feet. He simply would not take men as he found them, though they were perfectly willing to take him so. And the absurd ideas that had lodgment in his head! Chief among these were, that he must have a friend—a chum—who should be a man after his own heart. He had been looking for such a man for two years. He picked him out occasionally, but he never found him to suit. This one was not truthful, that one was not temperate, and the other was not nice in his speech. There was something lacking in each one.

"What I want is a whole man," he sighed; "I never could take up with one of these half-made fellows. But it is not so easy. Even when I find a man that is temperate and intellectual, he turns out to be selfish. What would I not give for a whole man for a friend and companion—a whole man!"

He would not take up with Mart Selby, though Mart saw "the young fellow" sorely needed a friend and helper, particularly one who would toughen him. He kept on looking for his made-to-order man, but he never seemed to hit upon him. Few such men as he was looking for are to be found within a thousand miles of Lucin's. In fact, at Lucin's you would be at a loss to discover a single man who did not like to take observations of old Ashby's cloth-and-paper ceiling through the bottom of a whisky-glass, and if you heard a voice, I will give you my word of honour it was not a cherub's.

One day the boys outdid all their other little meannesses to Robbins by getting him hopelessly drunk. Of course, it was no killing matter; but he had never been drunk before, and he took it very seriously, and resolved to leave camp next day.

Mart did not like this. His heart had warmed towards "the young fellow," and he hated to see him leave the place. Finally he resolved to go with him.

They agreed between them that they would not go on the range again. They would go prospecting for gold.

And thus it was that they came to make the journey over the desert towards Dead Horse Gulch. Now, as everybody in that country knows, the wealth of the Dead Horse Gulch is great, but it is very hard to reach. Miners who have lived out the awful heat of the alkali plain that lies all around the buttes wherein the gulch makes its gash, have come back with full belts, but none of them have ever gone a second time.

In suggesting this journey, Mart Selby had a double object. First, he wanted to toughen "the young fellow," and next, he wanted to enrich them both. Mart knew that Robbins had come out West to make enough money to marry a nice girl that lived in England, and he knew, too, that "the young fellow" had found money-making very slow work.

From Lucin's to the great alkali plain that lay before the buttes in which the gold was hidden was a long and toilsome journey. But the real work only began with the crossing of the alkali desert.

White and naked lay the dead land before their aching eyes. The eye of Heaven shone down with most relentless fierceness. No breath of air was stirring, and the whole world was to them as dumb as death.

Mart had counted on the journey being a hard one, but not so hard as this. He had not dreamt that the

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water would give out so soon, nor that the horses would sink down and die as they did.

Still they staggered on, their forms, bent under their heavy burdens, standing out sharp and raw above the white earth on which their clearly defined shadows fell with inky blackness.

In that cloudless, mistless air, distance seemed set at naught, for they travelled on and on towards the buttes, and yet they seemed to grow no nearer.

It was towards evening when they reached a rocky islet in the sea of alkali, and there, after a very bad meal of hard tack, they fell asleep, Robbins dreaming of clear cold water, drawn from marble fountains in crystal goblets. The young man was the first to awake. The sun was beginning to shoot his fiery needles over the mountain. Robbins lifted his hand to rub his eyes.

"R-r-z-z-z!"

Then a tongue of flame darted towards him, and struck him on the palm of the hand.

"Oh, Heaven!" he groaned. "it's a rattlesnake, and he's bitten me!"

His voice seemed to awaken a hundred echoes, and to these responded a hundred rattles.

Selby sat up in his blanket and stared at him stupidly. As he made the movement, a rattlesnake struck him in the face, and another at his side would have done the same had he not thrown himself out of reach of its deadly fangs.

The rattles resounded on every side. The two men ran back to a stretch of sand behind the rocks, and gazed at each other wildly.

"Hold still," demanded Mart. "Let me look at your bite." He grasped the boy's hand.

"Thank Heaven, it's not in the vein!"

He seized his knife, and quickly hollowed out a piece of flesh.

"There, hold your hand down and let the blood run free, while I tie this cord round your arm." He twisted the stout cord until it cut into the arm. "Now the whisky," he gasped.

"No," said Robbins, "let me cut the poison out of your wound."

Mart held still a moment while this was done.

"Now the whisky—quick!" cried Robbins.

But Selby did not look for the bringing forth of the flask with any light of hope in his eyes.

"It is yours," he said quietly. "There is only enough for one, and barely that."

"Then it is yours, Mart."

"No—yours."

"But you are the worse bitten. Your face is already beginning to swell. Drink it."

There was anguish in the tone, as there was heroism in the words; but it was heroism of the weakly sort. He held out the bottle at arm's length, while he turned his face away.

"No, no! It's yours, boy!" came in firmer and more commanding tones from Mart Selby. "You have a mother and a sweetheart back in the old country. And I—I have nobody. There was somebody once, but there ain't nobody now—nobody at all."

In the face of this fearful temptation, Robbins felt himself weakening. He grew less strong of resolution with each tick of the watch in his pocket, heard so plainly in the desert stillness. What a coward he felt himself; but—how sweet was life!

Was there no help to be had from other sources? He could not take this. The drinking of that liquid, was the drinking of Selby's life, and that life meant much to him now. Here was the whole man!

His eyes swept the hopeless plain. He looked for the "dust" of a traveller, but he saw none. The heat of the day was growing. He thought he felt the poison pulsing through his veins.

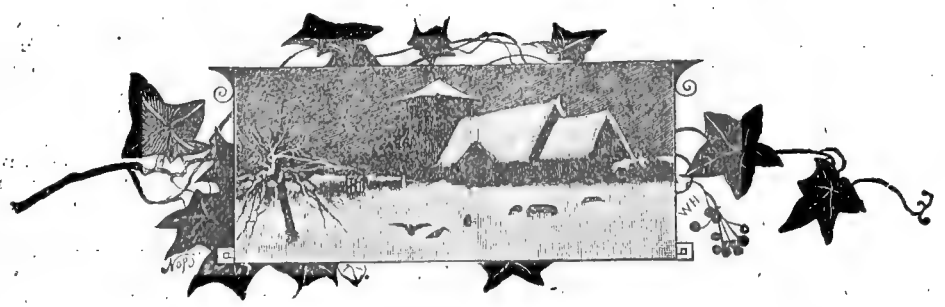
"No—no," he said, sinking down upon the sand. And there was a pitiable weakness in his voice.

Selby took the bottle from his hand. As he did so, a shade of fear arose to Robbins' face. Selby saw it and smiled. The swollen face made the smile grotesque; but, none the less, it was the smile of a god. He came forward, and knelt beside the crouching form of Robbins, who, lying on his face, with his eyes shut, begged him not to think of him, but of himself. But the tone was growing weaker.

The other said no word, but, lifting his friend's head, he uncorked the bottle and held it to his lips. A look of remonstrance came to Robbins' face, and he raised his hand to push away the bottle. Just then he glanced upwards. A buzzard was circling round in the clear blue air. He shivered, and, as the neck of the bottle was forced between his teeth, and Selby was holding back his head, how could he help swallowing? The look of remonstrance faded away as the liquor gurgled from the bottle. Soon it was all drained. The boy's head sank to the ground, and a heavy sleep laid hold upon him.

When he awoke there lay by his side the body of a man with a revolver bullet in his head.

T. A.



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A Change of Subject.

What in the world is the matter with Abbé Bernard, who is going, as usual, to the Sacred Heart Convent of Lille to initiate the prettiest girls of Flanders into the mysteries of the French language and literature?

He is wearing his shabby, everyday cassock, his nose is red, for the cold January east wind cuts his face, and his feet are frozen, for he has been walking in the snow for the last ten minutes, without even troubling himself to take the little path trodden along the streets by the first passers-by.

There is nothing extraordinary in all that; but it is certainly very extraordinary to see the good face of this worthy Abbé without its habitual smile. No, the Abbé is not smiling—a thing which has not happened for ten years; the Abbé is anxious—very anxious. He walks in the snow unconsciously, and even when he passes under the porch of the large convent, he does not reply to the "Good-morning, Monsieur l'Abbé!" of Sister Ursule, the worthy portress. There is certainly something the matter with Abbé Bernard—at least, that is the opinion of Sister Ursule, who, grumbling all the while, continues to sweep away the snow which obstructs the entrance to her domain.

If the Abbé is preoccupied, uneasy, the class of big girls is in a state of feverish agitation which the two under-governesses, Sister Madeleine and Sister Babette, can hardly control.

To-day is a great day. It is composition day. Up there, on the desk of Abbé Bernard, a large yellow envelope contains the subject of the composition, elaborated by the Superior Council and approved by the Bishop of Amiens.

All these heads, brown, blonde, and red, are in a state of excitement. What will be the subject of composition? They begin to argue about it. Will it be religious! Tall Adèle maintains that it will. Philosophic little Victoire says not; nor will it be scientific, as Mademoiselle de Saint-Roc strives to make them believe, and there is ceaseless prattling, cries and laughter.

At last the Abbé appears. They think he looks ill. Little by little silence is restored, and soon nothing is heard but the tic-tac of the old clock and the oppressed breathing of Sister Babette, who has a cold in the head.

All minds are intent, all eyes are fixed upon the yellow envelope, which the Abbé will open. But the Abbé, a little pale, although very firm, does not cut open the large yellow envelope, but fumbling in his pocket, draws forth another, a smaller one with five coats of arms.

Yes, it is certainly the arms of the Phalenpins—three martlets of gold on an azure background with the device: "God keep my race"; and in looking at these five waxen seals, he remembers all. The trot of a horse heard at midnight—the bell half pulled off—himself dressing in haste to open, believing that he was sought for some dying one, and his stupefaction on finding himself face to face with the young Marquis of Phalenpin, his well-beloved seignior, whom he had educated and instructed in heart and mind, and whom he loved with all his soul.

"Father," the Marquis said, "do you love me?"

And as he was protesting the strength of his affection ——,

"Good," replied the young man, "swear to me to do what I am going to ask you; swear, Father, for the happiness of my house depends upon it."

"The happiness of the house of the Phalenpins—good heavens!" And the Abbé swore without hesitation.

Then the Marquis, handing him the envelope which just now is puzzling his young pupils so much, said:

"You have the right, Father, to change, if it seems advisable to you, the subject of the composition which you are to give to-morrow at the Sacred Heart. Very well! Instead of the epistle of the Superior Council, read this to your pupils."

The Abbé was stupefied. "Yes," continued the Marquis, smiling at the frightened appearance of his ex-mentor, "you will read them this, and bring me the copies—I will correct them. Promise me, besides, not to break the seals until to-morrow—in front of your pupils."

Then he had departed, leaving the Abbé stunned, the envelope in his hand in the same position it occupies at this moment. But yesterday he was alone; it was night; he believed he was dreaming, whereas now the sun is shining, and he is sure that he is not dreaming, for he can hear a murmur of impatience in front. Besides, Sister Babette, noisily blowing her nose, recalls the fact he is fully awake.

Then, hesitating no longer, he breaks the five seals, and reads in a clear, firm voice:

"We, Jean-Jacques de Marquette, Marquis of Phalenpin, of Fives and of Saint-Juir, Count of Tourcoing, of Saint-Yf, of Blaisy, of Buire, Baron of Rosendaël, of Madeleine, of Stohen, etc., etc., desiring to take a wife, declare that we will divide our goods and lands with, and bestow our names and titles upon, the young and amiable girl who shall best treat the following subject."

Here the Abbé stopped a moment to take breath. He had read all that precedes without pausing, without wavering, but the effort had been very great, and he was forced to rest a moment. Moreover, his stupefaction equalled that of his pupils.

But when his eyes fell upon the title, he thought his sight was failing him; but it was really true. The title was spread out there in beautiful Gothic letters—there could be no mistake about it, and the Abbé read, or rather stammered in a choking voice:

"Simply tell what you think of love."

Sister Madeleine started up, then fell back thunderstruck.

As for Sister Babette, she blew her nose in B flat in such a distressing manner that the whole class looked at her with compassion, and the laugh which hovered on all those rosy lips died away as if frozen with fright.

The Abbé recovered his composure. After all the crime was committed. He could not now draw back. On the other hand, the Marquis being, through his great-grandfather, honorary canon to the archbishopric, took the responsibility in the matter on his own shoulders.

It was therefore in an almost firm voice that he repeated, "Simply tell what you think of love."

For a moment all was confusion. They wondered if he were serious or joking. They looked at the Abbé, who, amazed at his own audacity, appeared graver than ever.

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All had seen or heard of the Marquis, who was noted throughout the province for his peculiarities, and about whom the most extraordinary stories had been told. He was said to be handsome like his mother, who, with her beauty dazzled the whole countryside for twenty years; brave and proud like his father, who was drowned by the rise of the Escaut, while trying to save a poor wretch of a peasant.

After all, suppose it were true?

Each one sees herself marquise, and without more ado, they set to work.

Then a strange spectacle was seen. Fifty young girls—pupils of the Sacred Heart—oh, bitter irony! writing dissertations upon love under the superintendence of two sisters and an abbé.

All had read at home, in secret, novels or poems which their big brothers had forgotten to take away. All had some words here and there in the course of conversation, which their imagination, more or less weak, had turned, developed, and amplified.

All had some vague idea of this divine flower, whose seeds we carry in our hearts; a seed that, when it grows to blossom, enriches our whole existence, and gives us the strength to live in suffering, and to suffer without complaining.

They set about their work very quietly; but soon they warmed up to their task.

The five flowers of the coronet in perspective seized hold of all their imaginations and fired all their minds. And soon nothing is heard in the silence of the large hall but the tic-tac of the old clock, the feverish grating of the pens, and the respiration, more painful than ever, of Sister Babette, interrupted at regular intervals by the plaintive sighs of Sister Madeleine.

Maguelonne alone, in the midst of this restlessness, remained idle, quite ashamed of her inactivity. Maguelonne was a poor girl without father or mother; she was found when quite an infant at Phalenpin. This had been an event in the village; all the inhabitants had looked with astonishment at the little creature, richly dressed and wearing round her neck a chain of gold worth at least twenty pistoles.

"How heartless to have abandoned this sweet little creature," they said, and they talked and gossiped about it for a long time.

Finally, some kind-hearted peasants took her and brought her up.

Up to the age of twelve years she was allowed to run wild in the woods, barefooted, her hair floating in the breeze, always laughing and gay, gathering strawberries in summer and picking up dry wood in winter.

But one day the Mother Superior of the convent, having stopped by chance at the farm, saw Maguelonne, who looked so sweet and good with her clear blue eyes and long, disordered, golden hair, that, captivated by her lovely smile, she took her away with her to educate her. The pupil made rapid progress, and soon became the pride of her teachers. Her schoolmates grew jealous of her, and laughed at her; they jeered at her singular name, Maguelonne, at her shy, timid, and awkward ways.

Amid the general scratching of the pens hers alone is silent. Yet she writes better than all the others, for she has taken the prize each preceding year.

When the Abbé had commenced to read, "We, Jean-Jacques de Marquette, Marquis of Phalenpin," all her blood had rushed suddenly to her heart and she had scarcely had the strength to write her name at the top of the paper. For the Abbé had recalled to her an adventure which, though but a child, had made a deep impression on her mind.

She remembered it well. She was running about the woods in the winter, free from care and full of life, when she found, stretched across the road, a poor, old woman, unconscious, and with blood on her forehead.

It was poor old Basile, who was a little wrong in her head—all the village knew her well—and there she was alone in the centre of the wood, half dead and with nobody to help her.

As Maguelonne was crying and wringing her hands a handsome young lord appeared suddenly on horseback. He threw himself to the ground, raised the poor wounded woman, and running to a neighbouring stream, brought water in his beautiful velvet hat, revived her, and bathed her wounds.

Then he placed her on his horse, covering her with his own cloak, and all three returned to the village, where Maguelonne learnt that this handsome young lord was the Marquis of Phalenpin.

Maguelonne still sits idle, thinking only of that handsome young Marquis whose face from that time had occasionally troubled her maiden dreams.

But the old clock striking ten in a hollow tone awakens her with a start. What, already! Impossible! She has written nothing—absolutely nothing. She is in despair, but cannot help it. And thus it is that for the first time in her life Maguelonne, trembling and confused, hands in a blank paper.

* * * * *

When the young Marquis, shut up in his room, read those fifty compositions, his hair stood on end. Never, never had he believed in the possibility of such absurdities.

It was with a sigh of relief that he arrived at the last copy.

But—what! The paper was blank. It contained but one word, a name, sweet and harmonious in its simplicity—"Maguelonne." And the Marquis repeated it to himself: "Maguelonne, Maguelonne." Then, struck suddenly as by a divine inspiration, he exclaimed:

"Yes, you, you alone, poor dear ignorant one, merit my love. Your soul, no doubt, is as pure as the song of that nightingale which strikes upon and charms my ear!"

* * * * *

A fortnight afterwards Maguelonne was summoned to the convent parlour. When she entered she thought she was dreaming. Two pages, dressed in blue and gold, and carrying upon two velvet cushions a crown and keys of gold, came to meet her.

Then a handsome young lord approached, and, bending his knee, said to her:

"Maguelonne, I loved you without knowing you. I divined the beauty of your soul. Now that I see you my heart tells me that I am not deluded by a sweet dream. Will you, Maguelonne, live my life, endure my sorrows, and enjoy my pleasures? Will you bear my name, for the glory of my race and the happiness of my life?"

Maguelonne could not believe her ears. She felt her soul open to great, unknown joys, and, feeling as if she were dying—for her heart was beating violently—she burst into tears, repeating mechanically:

"Oh! my lord. My dear lord——"

A short time afterwards Jean de Marquette, heir to fiefs without number, wedded, before God and man, his dearly-loved little Maguelonne.

Guy de Saint-Mor.

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THE VENGEANCE OF THE DEAD.

I am a doctor. Some years ago, after spending half a decade in Oriental travel and study, I returned to my home in Naples.

As soon as I was settled, I took the steamer for Portici to visit Claudia. Leaning over the rail, I mused on certain changes which had taken place during my absence. When I set off on my travels, Claudia, then a beautiful girl of eighteen, was engaged to marry my best friend, Count Scala. But very soon the startling news came to me that my unfortunate friend had lost his life, having been washed overboard while crossing from Naples to Genoa. Six months later I learnt that Claudia had married a young Neapolitan, Leone Viotti, who had been Scala's rival, and who, according to certain whisperings, was rather more to the girl's fancy. While I was thus reflecting the steamer arrived, and I made my way to the Villa Viotti.

When she caught sight of me, Claudia came running down the terrace steps with an exclamation of delighted surprise.

"What, doctor, is it really you?" she cried. "So you have returned at last! We were beginning to think you must have turned Brahmin, or that some tiger in the jungle had devoured you."

She held out her hand to me, and I pressed my lips to it.

"You have grown even more beautiful than before," I said, gazing with admiration at her lovely face and dark waving hair. "It is very evident that the sun of love shines brightly on your pathway."

"Yes, I am very happy," she said, lifting her large dark eyes to mine. "I know Count Scala was your friend, but you will not be angry with me. I never really loved the Count, and I implored him to release me, but he would not. I have sometimes thought," she continued, while an almost cruel expression came upon her face, "that the anger he aroused in my heart brought him misfortune. Had he not died, I cannot think what would have happened."

Thus talking, we walked up towards the villa.

"Look, there is my boy!" exclaimed Claudia suddenly, and a handsome little lad of three came running down the path.

We stopped and chatted with the little fellow for a few minutes, and then went on, Pepino disappearing behind a large clump of flowering plants in chase of a pretty butterfly.

The rays of the declining sun streamed across the front of the villa, bathing it in a flood of red from roof to basement. I cannot say why, but I experienced a painful presentiment, a vague fear, as though some sorrow or danger threatened me. Ah! Would to God I had fled from the spot where I was so soon to witness such a tragedy!

We entered a large paved vestibule, and then a small room opening into the conservatory.

"I understand that you do not often come to Portici," I said to my hostess, when we were comfortably seated.

"No, Leone has a sort of aversion to the villa," she replied, "so we are almost always in Rome. My husband is usually very nervous, but by the sea he is worse. He consented to come here now only on account of Pepino, whose health is always better near the sea."

Presently she rose to order some refreshment, and while she was gone, I could not help thinking of poor Scala, whose death had occurred so opportunely, and been so little mourned by her who was to have been his wife. They had been betrothed from infancy. Claudia had appeared to me to feel some affection for him, but she was only a child then, and when her woman's heart awoke, it seemed it was given to another. The Count was not blind to this, but he loved her passionately, and hoped after marriage to win back her heart. His death was very strange. Could it, I wondered, have been a voluntary one?

Claudia's return interrupted my reflections, and when she had again seated herself, she begged me with almost a child's enthusiasm, to tell her about India, "about giant trees, elephants as big as houses, fakirs with birds' nests in their eyebrows, and green gods with thirty-six arms."

I related some of my most stirring adventures, and when I had finished, I questioned her in turn. She told me how her father had died shortly after her marriage, leaving her an orphan. She had only her husband and child left to love, and her love for them filled her heart to overflowing.

She chatted on with a smile upon her lovely face, her chin resting on her hand in an attitude full of unstudied grace. I gazed at her in silent admiration, thinking to myself that the man who possessed her love must indeed be happy.

Suddenly her countenance changed, and she started up with a cry of alarm. I turned hastily. A servant was running towards us with Pepino in her arms in frightful convulsions.

"Oh, madame," she cried, "what is the matter with him? See how convulsed he is!"

I hurried to the child, who was writhing in his mother's arms, and from the bright red colour which besmeared his lips, judged he must have eaten of some poisonous fruit.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "what poison can it be?"

"Poison!" cried Claudia. "No, no; there is nothing poisonous anywhere here. Children often have these

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dreadful convulsions. But you will cure him, doctor, won't you?"

I could make no reply. The child was in a strange, and most alarming condition. While doing what I could to relieve him and watching the symptoms, I fancy I recognised the effects of a poison known only under foreign skies.

"It is impossible," I muttered. "Where could he have found that awful plant?"

I undressed the child and endeavoured to revive him by friction, but without success. Opening his small cramped fingers, I found what confirmed my worst suspicion, the crushed pulp of a vermilion-coloured fruit or flower. An exclamation of dismay broke from me.

"The serpent-flower! Alas, poor child, there is no hope for him!"

The mother uttered a cry which wrung my heart. She threw herself beside the poor little body and covered it with passionate kisses, sending up fervent prayers to Heaven to save her darling boy from death.

The father was sent for, and came in with haggard eyes, and quivering, livid lips.

"Leone, Leone!" cried Claudia, in an agony, "he is dying, our child is dying."

I was unnerved, cut to the heart by the terrible grief of the woman who was just now so happy, and by my own powerlessness.

In vain the frantic mother strove to bring her darling to consciousness; the merry laugh was silenced for ever, the little life was ended almost before it had begun.

An hour later I was walking in the garden, musing. As I strolled up and down, strange memories took possession of my mind. I seemed to see myself back again in Calcutta. I was seated under the verandah of my bungalow, writing a letter. As I indulged in this fancy the scene became more vivid. I saw myself finish the letter, place it in an envelope, drop a few strange-looking seeds, then seal it to Count Antonio Scala.

In a flash the reason of these recollections was revealed to me. The grains I had inclosed in the letter were some seeds from the serpent-flower. I remembered now that I had asked my friend to sow some of the seeds in a corner of his garden, and to inform me if the plants could be acclimatised in Italy. I was at the time studying the properties of the plant, which I thought might prove of value in medicine. But the Count had met his death shortly after the receipt of my letter, and it had remained for ever unanswered.

My musings had carried me thus far towards the solution of the mystery, when they were interrupted by a murmur of voices, and presently a group of gardeners and servants of the villa came along with spades and axes, going to destroy the accursed plant that had been the death of their beloved little Pepino.

I followed them, and soon we came to the place where it grew. I recognised it instantly. The serpent-flower is one of the strangest flowers I had ever seen. It resembles a small sheaf of serpents standing erect on their tails, and bending their heads towards a small red fruit something like a strawberry, but more velvety and flower-like. It is the flowers that resemble serpents; they swell out at the top in the shape of heads, and these heads are marked with two eyes and a sharp thorn which projects like a fang.

Before attacking the shrub, the servants, with the excitability common to Neapolitans, heaped abuse and curses upon it.

"Ah, baneful plant! A flowering devil! Viper knots!" they cried, and then they pounced upon it and endeavoured to pull it up by the roots. But it was firmly imbedded, and at first resisted all their efforts.

Suddenly a portion of the bush gave way, and the men fell back a step or two. But they came forward again and bent over the exposed roots. Then I saw a look of horror cross their faces; a terrible clamour arose among them, and dropping everything they rushed away, crossing themselves as they ran.

I hurried to the opening and looked in. Oh, the terrible, revolting, appalling sight that met my gaze! The roots, like claws, held in their grip a skull, while in a most horrible way they entwined themselves about the body. It was a skeleton with remains of hair and beard, and pieces of clothing mingling with the fibres of the plant. The hollow eyes seemed to gaze at me; they fascinated me, and my hair rose on end with horror. I seemed to hear a groan; then it rose louder and clearer and I distinctly caught the words, "Avenge me!" I stayed no longer, but turned and ran like a madman to the house.

The unhappy parents were still in the room with their dead child.

"Scala, Scala! it is Scala!" I cried, bursting in upon them. In my confusion of mind I could think of nothing else to say; I was choking with fear, frozen with horror.

Leone had risen at the sound of my voice. He gazed at me wildly, with great black rings round his eyes.

"You killed him," I went on, I had recovered from my fear, and my indignation burst forth. "I see how it was. He had my letter upon him, and it held your punishment—the terrible poison, the germ of this accusing plant. His murder is avenged; he has slain your child. But it will not end there! The crime is discovered, the alarm given: the murderer cannot deny his guilt."

My voice was harsh and menacing. I panted for breath.

The guilty man slowly shook his head.

"Deny it! Why should I deny it?" he said. "I know it is all over. Yes, I killed him. I bought my love at the price of a crime. It was so decreed by fate, but I tell you, had it been necessary, I would have strewn with corpses the path that led me to my beloved. You have never loved, you have the right to condemn me, but love will be able to absolve me."

The frankness of his confession disconcerted me, I was silent.

Claudia, wrapped in her great grief, had understood nothing. Leone drew her towards him, gazing at her with unutterable love, and kissing away the tears that blinded her beautiful eyes.

"Listen, my darling," he said, "your poor torn heart must bear another sorrow. For one moment stay your grief while I make my confession to you. Before I go away, I must have your forgiveness."

"Going away?" she exclaimed in tones of wonderment. With a quick gesture she laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked at him with a fixed and anxious gaze.

"Yes," he responded, and then he went on: "You remember, Claudia, that wretched evening when—every hope for us dead—I wandered round your home, mad with anxiety, not daring to enter. I peered into the windows of your lighted rooms, into the light at the

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open door. You were making one last effort to move Count Scala, to induce him to give you up. Oh, what torture I suffered during those few minutes!

"Suddenly you appeared in the light of the door, you descended the steps, and I clasped you, cold and trembling, in my arms.

"'All is over,' you cried. 'He refuses to release me. He is with my father, fixing the wedding-day. Farewell, I cannot live through it!' And you vanished into the red stream of light.

"An hour later the Count appeared at the door with your father. I learnt from their talk that the Count was to take a steamer immediately for Naples on business connected with the anticipated marriage. I wove the fact into the plan of my revenge.

"As he ran lightly down the path, I followed him, hiding in the shadows of the arbutus trees, and gliding along as silently as a beast of prey. Suddenly, I threw myself upon him, seizing him by the throat with one hand to prevent his uttering a cry, while with the other I plunged my dagger into his heart."

"You only acted as I would have done," cried Claudia, who had been drinking in her husband's words. "I should have killed him on the wedding night."

Leone turned upon me with a look of triumph. His wife had absolved him without a moment's hesitation, and her forgiveness satisfied him. He pressed her to his heart, and then proceeded to relate in firmer tones how, by a bold and ingenious plan of disguise, he had succeeded in getting it believed that his victim had been washed overboard from the steamer on which he had booked as a passenger. The Count's body was never recovered from the waves.

"Claudia, being liberated by Count Scala's death," he continued, "her father had no further reason for refusing her to me. She became my dear wife. The bliss of our union filled my whole soul, and drowned all remembrance of my rival.

"Nevertheless, I avoided the villa Portici, until Claudia talked of selling it because of my dislike for it, and thus forced me to come back in order to turn her from such a dangerous idea.

"Two months ago I came to the villa alone, to prepare it for our return. What strange attraction was it that led my feet towards the spot I would have shunned? Suddenly I gave a cry of alarm. There on the place of that secret, unknown grave, I saw that terrible plant, those blood-red flowers with their threatening fangs like serpents. What was it? How came it here? I seized it and tried to tear it up, but it was too firmly rooted, and I only made my fingers bleed with the thorns. Just then the gardener came up.

"'I was wishing to ask you about this bush,' he said. 'I did not like to dig it up without orders. It is a curious plant, and I set great store by it.'

"I thought I might forget the horrible plant, which fear had forced me to preserve, but its fangs had fastened themselves upon my memory, and its venom had entered my soul. I avoided the side of the park where the thing flourished, but I felt it was ever growing, becoming a shrub, a tree, a forest. I fancied I saw its threatening gestures, and heard its cries for vengeance; Ah, I knew he was waiting for us!"

Although he had begun his recital calmly, Leone was now feverishly excited. Claudia was weeping over his shoulder.

As for myself, I was deeply impressed by the man's story, and for Claudia's sake, if for no other reason, I began to regret that the crime had been discovered. As we stood there for a moment silent, many thoughts flashed through my brain, among them the disconcerting one that it was I who had been an indirect cause of all the misery I saw before me, and that it was in a way my hand that had laid the cold chill of death on the little body only a few hours ago so full of life and happiness. Then the present demands of the situation forced themselves upon me.

"How are you to escape from justice?" I cried. "The terrified gardeners have given the alarm. Is there still time for you to fly?"

Sounds were heard coming from the park. Leone listened, then shook his head.

"It is too late," he said; "but they shall not take me alive."

Claudia shrieked, and embraced her husband passionately.

"Kill me first," she moaned; "I cannot see you die."

Her beautiful hair had come unfastened, and streamed in disorder beneath Leone's lips. In the waving tresses shone a crimson flower. Leone's eyes searched the room, as if for a weapon. Suddenly they fell upon the blossom. For an instant he shivered and drew back, then, folding his beloved in a last embrace, he put his lips to the flower and ate it.

"Stop, stop!" I screamed. "It is the serpent-flower!"

"Thank you," he said; "watch over her."

Claudia, pale as death, rose quickly to her feet. She saw her husband's face grow convulsed, his lips bleed; she opened her mouth as if to shriek, and sank, without a sound, and insensible, to the floor.

Claudia never recovered from the shock of that terrible day. Her reason was gone, and six months later she died. The serpent-flower had done its work; the dead man was indeed avenged.

JUDITH GAUTIER.

WHAT DO DREAMS MEAN?

WHO has not at one time or another had some curious dream, the significance of which has perplexed him? Some dreams are caused by an overheated imagination or an impaired digestion, and others are so trivial as not to cause any grounds for a second thought being bestowed upon them.

On the other hand, there are many dreams which have an unquestionable significance. Many of them are influenced by our daily actions and thoughts, and frequently we find ourselves doing in our dreams what we would do in our daily life. These exercise our minds, and if we only knew what they portend we might be able to avoid events that afterwards come to pass. The history of the world is full of instances where dreams of a prophetic character have taken place, and the belief in them is shared by scientific and intelligent writers in every part of the world.

Occasionally a so-called dream book or two has been published pretending to give an explanation of these curious phenomena, but, as we all know, most of them are absolutely unreliable and are nothing but catchpenny publications.

We recently made the acquaintance of a lady who has made the laws of Oneirology a life study, and her explanations we have found to be singularly true in cases upon which we have consulted her. She has the reputation of being the most expert person in the world in this science. Accordingly we have made arrangements with her to give the fullest information to any reader of this paper who cares to send asking her advice. Readers should be very careful to explain in the fullest manner the whole extent of their dream. MADAME GEORGES will reply, giving a full explanation.

Readers should address their letters to "DREAMS," c/o. *Short Stories* Offices, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C., and inclose six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope for reply.

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GREAT - WAR - COMPETITION.

FIRST PRIZE . . £5
Five Prizes of £1 each.

25 Prizes of Handsome Books.
25 Gold-plated Pencil-cases.

In the event of a tie, the prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

SO much interest is at the present moment centred in that part of the world round the unfortunate Island of Cuba, that the competition we have inaugurated, should commend itself particularly to readers of *Short Stories*.

Below will be found eight pictures. Each one depicts the name of some place, or ship, or man associated with the combatants. Five sets of these pictures will be published. Write down the names in the spaces provided, and keep all the sets by you until we ask you to send them in.

The daily newspapers will give you the best help in discovering solutions, as most of the names depicted have already appeared in the press.

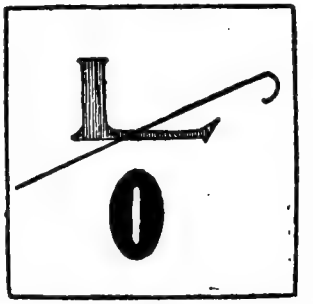
PERSON.

No. 17.....

WARSHIP.

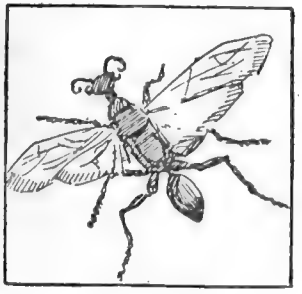
No. 18.....

WAR VESSEL.



No. 19.....

WARSHIP

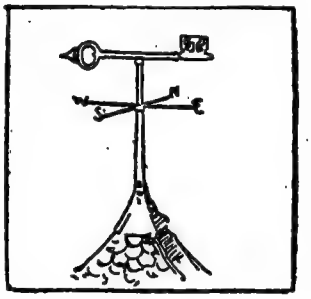


No. 20.....

PERSON.

No. 21.....

PLACE.



No. 22.....

PLACE.

No. 23.....

WAR COMPETITION.

No. 3.

Name.....

Address.....

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WARSHIP.

No. 24.....

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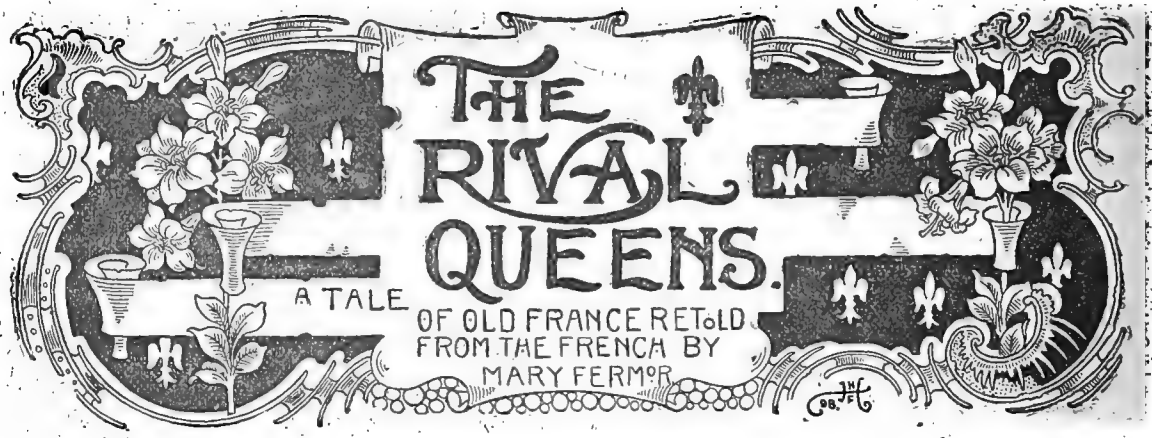

CHAPTER XXIII.

Master of the Situation.

Mastering his astonishment as best he could, Philip Augustus looked round the room to see by which of the four doors the assassin could have entered.

"I came in by the same door as the poniard," said the Syrian deliberately, as if in answer to the King's unspoken question.

The stranger's voice acted on Philip as the spur does on a thorough-bred, and he drew himself up, calm and self-possessed, in his accustomed royal dignity.

"I expected you," he said, "but not so soon."

There was a tinge of mockery in the answer.

"The King could not fail to expect me, since the 'King knows *all*.'"

Philip Augustus looked with increased attention at this remarkable man, whose self-possession was only exceeded by his intelligence, and he prepared to study this inscrutable foe, so as, if possible, to turn him to his own account. It might be that he could buy this man's allegiance, and in that case he would win a valuable addition to his informal secret police. One thing was certain, and that was that the man had lost an excellent opportunity by not attacking him when his back was turned, and that might portend that the infidel was prepared to change his master. Now Philip had his trusty sword within his reach, and what dagger could avail against that?

"You do not seem to have much faith in the King's omniscience, my friend?"

"We have a proverb," answered Mahmoud-el-Reis, "which says—'Know all—know nothing'—and that means that human knowledge is blind and vain."

"And did you take the trouble to come here into my palace to tell me the proverbs of your country? It is not generally for *that*, Mahmoud-el-Reis, that the sons of Ismail insinuate themselves into the presence of kings!"

The Moslem's eye never quailed before the searching glance that met it, and he replied simply:

"I intended to kill you and I could not do it. I could have killed you and I would not do it."

"Your first statement is probably true, but you can't expect me to believe the second."

Mahmoud drew himself up into his usual attitude of calm defiance.

"Last night, at this hour, the King rode through the avenue that leads from the Porte St. Honoré to the Louvre, and he was alone with his page Albret. When the drawbridge was lowered, did the King recognise the archer who came forward to take his bridle?"

Philip Augustus opened his eyes very wide, with the air of one who has just had a difficulty explained away for him.

"It was *you*. Yes, you are speaking the truth, you might easily have killed me then."

A moment later he added, with an impulse of curiosity that he could not resist:

"Why didn't you do it?"

"Why did you not cut my throat a few minutes ago, when you thought I had come to assassinate you and that I was in your power? Because you wanted to make use of me, and you are wise, for I can do more for you than ten of your proud barons. I did not kill you, in spite of the oath I swore to my father and the Master, because I have a desire, dearer to me than all else, and only the King of France can grant it to me."

"Oh, oh!" cried Philip, "this must be something very precious! Then you've come to make a bargain with me, Sir Mahmoud?"

"Yes, it's a bargain."

"Is it anything like the one you concluded with the Caliph Salim?" asked the King with a smile.

"I related that story to the 'Friend of the King,' so that the King should hear it," said the Syrian gravely, "If not, I should have had to repeat it now, so that the King might know what Mahmond-el-Reis can do."

It must be borne in mind that Philip was strongly imbued with the spirit of adventure, and had been steeped in the romance of chivalry from his boyhood. This strange interview had a kind of charm for him, it took him back to the days he had spent in the East.

"You need not enlarge upon your prowess, friend Mahmoud, for I know it well. The English can hit a mark at five hundred feet, the Danes swim like the fish in their own seas, the Rhenish soldiers can kill a fly with a stone from their slings, and the Italian subjects of the Holy Father have a genius for secret poisoning; but you from the region of the Anti-Lebanon stand unrivalled as accomplished assassins! Every nation has its strong point. Nor is it necessary for you to tell me the hand that really guides your poniard," added the King with an involuntary expression of triumph. "It is not the noble Saladin who fights thus against a loyal friend! Your master has been bribed by that arch-coward, John of England; it is he who has paid the price of blood!"

It is certain that Philip hoped to impress the Syrian by displaying this intimate knowledge of his affairs, but Mahmoud smiled indulgently as one does on a child who is making very laudable efforts which deserve encouragement.

"If the King's unworthy servant were sleeping on the dry moss of the forest between the lair of the lion and the hole of the viper, would he blame the lion for the poisonous sting

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that caused his foot to swell and awoke him with its agony? The lion and the viper may be known by the wounds they inflict."

"And the men of the East by their long-winded metaphors!" said the King under his breath. "Now what do you want with me?" he added aloud.

"First of all, I want to know whether one must flatter and deceive you as a king, or teach you as a man who has yet much to learn?"

"Speak quietly, and with due respect, if I am to listen to you, and you think to carry away your head on your shoulders!" said the King with an angry frown.

"Ah!" replied the Moslem, in a resigned voice, "I fear we have only been losing time, as you begin to threaten me. If you will not consent to treat me on equal terms, I must prove to you that, even here in your stronghold, you are not the master!"

"Take care!" cried Philip, looking at his sword, "I am losing patience!"

"I shall have patience enough for both."

The King strode to where his sword hung, took it down, and seated himself with the bare blade across his knees. Then he began in a severe tone:

"You are here, in my power, Mahmoud-el-Reis. I do not know by what means you entered my presence; but the traitor who helped you to do so, will no longer be able to protect you. Look at me!" he continued, extending his muscular right arm towards the Moslem. "Do you think that if I were reduced to contesting my life with you that victory would fall to your side?"

"On the plain, if you were mounted on your heavy charger, and bore a stout lance in your hand, I daresay you would overpower me, but here, armed as we are, I think my scimitar would tell against your sword."

The King rose angrily, and said in a bitter tone:

"I shall not attempt such an unequal struggle, friend Mahmoud. It would not add much to the fame of Philip Augustus to cleave your head in twain! There are others whose business it is to attend to such small matters."

So saying he went to the second door, near his bed, at which two mace-bearers of his body-guard watched night and day. He drew back the curtains without taking the trouble to see what was behind them, so intent was he upon proving to the arrogant Moslem how perfectly he was protected. No sign of surprise or emotion showed itself upon the dark features before him, and he turned in a state of irritation to summon the guards, when the words died upon his lips and he staggered back in dismay.

Instead of the honest faces of his trusty guards, there grinned at him the hideous countenances of two negroes, who had been painted up to resemble Europeans, and whose dark glassy eyes were glittering with savage ferocity.

"Albret! Come hither!" cried the King hoarsely. "Hither, my pages and equerries. Come hither!"

At last Mahmoud moved and walked slowly to the door opposite the one in charge of his black slaves. He drew aside the curtain and showed the insensible forms of Albret and two of the equerries lying on the floor.

The King gave a cry of horror and grief, for he thought they were dead.

"They only sleep," said Mahmoud quietly, "but he who gave them this drug might as easily have given them a fatal one: only he will never take another life!"

He unfastened his scimitar and threw it at the feet of Philip Augustus, saying humbly:

"Now, will the King believe his servant, and hear what he has to say?"

It was a strange picture! The guards sleeping their enforced sleep; the two grotesque slaves, sword in hand, glaring at their prey, and the King gazing in stupefaction at the assassin who had just disarmed himself. Mahmoud-el-Reis was the first to speak, and there was sadness mingled with the resolution of his voice.

"Whoever fails to accomplish his oath to the Grand

The King seated himself with the bare blade across his knees.

Master, is taken, on his return, through the city at mid-day to the great forest of Khyam, where he is stripped naked and bound to a hurdle. Then all the priests, dervishes and wise men, gather round him to say the prayers for the dead. For twelve hours, and twelve times in every hour, the soldiers and fellow assassins come to strike him across the face, crying:

"'Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!'

"When the twelfth hour has sounded from the minarets of the city, the priests, the dervishes, the wise men and soldiers, the assassins and the people, all combine in one final malediction on the unhappy victim and leave him alone with the executioner.

"This man cuts twelve deep gashes across the traitor's chest, and then retires to a safe distance, knowing that the blood flowing from the wounds he has made will attract the tiger from his lair, no matter how far off he may be. The tiger is not long in coming to complete the butchery begun by human hands.

"That, O King, is the fate to which I have condemned myself, and I accept it willingly!"

Philip Augustus had taken his seat again on a high, carved, throne-like chair over which were the coat-of-arms and the crown of France, while Mahmoud remained standing at some distance from him.

Between the two fell the bright patch of light from the lamp, and all around there was comparative darkness. The King listened thoughtfully, wonderingly, to the measured tones of the Syrian, who seemed to be thinking aloud, rather than addressing himself to his hearer. He resumed his meditative soliloquy.

"I have described to you the destiny I have chosen. Now hear the one which I have forfeited by my own act."

He then repeated, in much the same words as he had used to Ingeburge, the story of his happy wooing and promised bliss with Dilah, which he had chosen in preference to riches, lands, honours or power, all of which were offered to the successful assassin of Philip Augustus.

For a moment his voice failed as he dwelt upon the joys

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"The bargain's closed!" said the King.

that had awaited him, and his eyes were clouded by a mist as he gazed into the shadows, but his tone was firm and his eye clear by the time he turned to the King, saying:

"That was to be my fate, and I will not accept it."

For a few seconds the King tried to pierce the veil which the Moslem kept so jealously over his inmost thoughts, but in vain. The face was as impassive and impenetrable as ever.

"And what price do you ask me for the renunciation of so bright a lot, and the acceptance of this tragic fate?"

"I come to ask you for that which neither the threats of kings, the prayers of the people, nor the thunders of the Church, have been able to obtain."

The King started in his chair.

"Oh! So you come from Madame Ingeburge?" he said quickly, while his face assumed an expression of suspicion and mistrust.

There was a faint tinge of contempt in the smile with which Mahmoud-el-Reis greeted this question, and his face flushed slightly as he answered:

"Oh, no! You do *not* know *all*—or if you do, God has deprived you of your reason! You love and protect her who deceives you, and abandon the one who adores you!"

"I am my own master," said Philip curtly, turning away with ill-concealed annoyance. Then, with an attempt at banter, he added:

"Madame Ingeburge chooses strange ambassadors!"

"Madame Ingeburge weeps and prays," replied the Syrian in a gentle voice, "weeps because of your cruelty and prays for you unceasingly. Five days ago I gained admission to the Abbey where you had imprisoned her. I went to assassinate her, for I had been promised the life of the King in exchange for that of the Queen. But God is great! The hand of God intercepted my hand. I saw the image of Dilah, my beloved, as that of an angel guarding the person of my intended victim, and when your soldiers entered the Abbey, I feared for her at your hands as I had done for her at those of your people, for I was her slave! Ah, you may smile," he broke off, "but we are talking of grave matters, of the destiny of Philip Augustus, King of France! I feared for her because I know she is an obstacle in your path, and such hindrances you get rid of. I would have defended the Queen against the fury of your soldiers, and I would protect her against the intrigues of your policy. If I am wrong, pardon me, and it will soon be seen whether I am right or not."

The King shrugged his shoulders and preserved a haughty silence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FATE OF THE STATUE.

"I BORE her away," continued Mahmoud-el-Reis, "from the midst of that carnage in my arms—in these arms which she had had bound but a few hours before in order to protect your life from my poniard. I carried her, fainting as she was, to a sure and safe retreat, known only to myself and my dumb slaves. There, in the deep recesses of the forest, I have guarded her and listened to the sweet tones of her voice, and, if you seek the explanation of my mysterious conduct, and the clue to my seeming irresolution, which have baffled the reasonings of your subtle intellect, of which you are so proud, know, then, O King, that your pure and saintly wife has worked a miracle! I am now a Christian!"

It is hard, almost impossible in fact, for us in these days of universal toleration and widespread indifference, to form any idea of the effect produced on the mind of Philip Augustus by these words. He knew the awful gulf which then yawned between the Cross and the Crescent, he had taken part in the wars that their deadly feuds had called into existence, and which had decimated the fairest families of the West. He had seen the impassioned fanaticism with which the followers of Islam fought for their faith, and knew something of the fate that awaited an apostate at their hands. That a member of the celebrated *Fédavi*, the picked band of assassins employed by the Lord of the Mountain, should abjure his faith at the teaching of a woman, seemed so incredible to Philip Augustus that he repeated the words as if to assure himself that he had heard aright.

"You are a Christian?"

Then as the other again answered in the affirmative, he added:

"But you will not now return to your native land, where you know that terrible death awaits you? Your change of faith releases you from any further responsibility in the matter."

"I swore to return to Dilah, my beloved, and I may not break faith with her, for she too must learn this wondrous lesson, before we go to our doom together."

There was no shaking the intrepid resolution of this man, so Philip changed the subject and turned to the affairs more closely concerning himself. The night wore on and the dawn was approaching. Albret and the guards still slept their magic sleep, and not a sound was heard in the palace except the voices of the archers at their posts and the chiming of the city clocks.

When the first rays of daylight began to struggle against the fading light of the lamp, Philip Augustus and Mahmoud-el-Reis were still in deep converse. They were sitting close together and their voices were lowered, although there was none to hear them.

"There are eight of them," the Syrian was saying, "There's Herbert Melfast, Lord of Pevensey, who came to

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fetch me from my home; Maître Honoré, the Freemason, bribed by the Duke of Burgundy; Jean de Valenciennes, paid by the Count Darmartin; Steinbach of Hamburg, in the service of the Emperor Otto; the three brothers Guiscard, who are the creatures of Baldwin, Count of Flanders; and the eighth——" he stopped short.

"The eighth came from Denmark, didn't he?" asked the King.

"No, he comes from France."

"Name him!"

"Amaury Montruel, Lord of Anet!"

"The Friend of the King!" added Philip sardonically, while in his own mind he repeated: "Who took Madame Agnes, alone, to the Rue de la Calandre at eleven o'clock that night."

"The bargain's closed!" said the King, rising suddenly, and giving his hand to Mahmoud. "You have the word of the King of France upon it!"

"And you have the word of Mahmoud-el-Reis."

"At midnight, in the choir of Nôtre-Dame!" said Philip.

"At midnight, I alone of the nine assassins shall be alive."

So they parted in the dim light of the early morning, and when his guards awoke, the King did not see fit to reproach them for their unwariness.

In the day that followed this momentous interview at the Louvre, Bishop Maurice de Sully was busily engaged in preparing his Cathedral for its first service of consecration. Though still far from finished, the work was that night to receive the blessing of the assembled prelates, and be the scene of the final decision of the Council.

The work was stopped in good time so that the masons might put the finishing touches to the interior arrangements under the direction of the Bishop himself. It was a red-letter day for all those who had been engaged in the great work. Each man loved the place nearly as much as did Maurice de Sully; he could put his hands on the stone he had cut or fixed in its place. They had all watched the growth and development of the great structure with the enthusiasm of artists and the devotion of Christians.

The whole of the gallery overlooking the inclosure had been wreathed and garlanded with flowers, and the good Bishop had not had the heart to refuse the masons the pleasure of hanging their own banners from the temporary roof that still covered part of the nave. The choir, which was the farthest advanced, had been provided with the proper means of lighting it; but it was no easy task to extend the illumination throughout the body of the Cathedral. It took them all the time from sunset till midnight to fix groups of candles to the capitals of the pillars, and hang festoons of light from the cornices or any other projection that lent itself to the purpose: at last, however, the task was done, and when the High Altar blazed out in its wealth of light and beauty, Bishop Maurice fell on his knees and thanked God for the fulfilment of his heart's desire. Around him knelt the men whose hands had wrought the work, and from the lips of those humble toilers rose the first solemn *Te Deum* within the walls that their labours had raised to such stately proportions.

The crowd had been gathering for hours outside, for the ceremony was to be a public one, and all who could find room were to be admitted without distinction.

Many dark rumours were afloat. Several well-known men had that day come by violent and mysterious deaths, and it was further reported that the dead body of Queen Ingeburge had been carried into the Cathedral, but that as soon as this service was over, her embalmed remains were to set out under an escort to the coast, to take ship for the kingdom of her brother Canute. Some even said they had seen the splendid coffin and the dark robed nuns watching round it in the apse of Nôtre-Dame.

Towards eleven o'clock the procession of Bishops and other ecclesiastics wended its way from the palace in the city to the Cathedral, preceded by monks and acolytes swinging censers and chanting the eighty-fourth psalm. The banner of Nôtre-Dame and those of the daughter churches were borne in the rear, and the light of countless tapers flashed on the gorgeous vestments and jewelled mitres of the learned company.

The great door at the west end was thrown open to receive them, and as they filed into their appointed places, the Cathedral choir took up the solemn chant. As soon as

A herald . . . proclaimed . . . "His Majesty, the KING!"

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the members of the Council were seated, the Freemasons ranged themselves on the left of the nave, and then the crowd was free to enter. As they rushed to their places, cries of wonder and admiration were heard on all sides, regardless of the stern looks which some of the ecclesiastics cast at the simple-minded folk.

An open space in front of the altar had been left for the King and his attendants, and special places had been reserved for the great vassals of the crown. The Freemasons were all wearing the dress of their order, and each man bore his blunted lance wreathed with ribbons. When the popular excitement had partly died away, all eyes were turned to the south door through which the King and his suite were to enter, and over which was situated the workshop of the mysterious sculptor Jean Cador.

One side of the shed had been removed, and a strange sight was visible. It was a study in black and white, with a strong light thrown upon it, the figures of two black men, one on either side of a statue veiled in purest white. In point of mobility the living men lost nothing by comparison with the lifeless marble.

Everyone knew that this was the famous statue which Jean Cador had been commissioned to carve—but when was it to be unveiled? And when were those two motionless figures to show some sign of life? All the other beauties of Nôtre-Dame had now been revealed to the eyes of the multitude, and with the perversity of human nature that one veiled block of marble possessed far more charm for the majority than all the treasures that were displayed around them.

In the ranks of the Freemasons they were whispering.

"We are all here but Jean de Valenciennes and Maître Honoré our brother."

"And Jean Cador," put in another voice.

"Oh, he has never been near us since the day he was admitted," said an old mason.

Eric came in with his sister at this moment and heard the remarks his comrades were making.

"Neither Jean de Valenciennes nor Maître Honoré will be with you to night," he said, "for Jean was found with his skull cleft by a sword in his own house, and Maître Honoré was stabbed in the apartments of Herbert Melfast, Lord of Pevensey."

"Woe to that false Saxon!" muttered several voices.

"He has nothing to fear from you," continued Eric, "for the same blade that dispatched our comrade, pierced his false heart."

A dread silence fell on those who heard this tale of summary slaughter. Death seemed stalking unresisted through their midst.

A later arrival brought news that in the middle of the Great Bridge, under the lamp that hung before the shrine of the Virgin, had been found the three corpses of the brothers Guiscard; and at the very door of Nôtre-Dame, a German, named Steinbach of Hamburg, had been struck down by an invisible foe. He had uttered one cry and his blood had welled out on the pavement, at the foot of the steps.

"Room! Room!" cried the heralds from time to time, as one important personage after another arrived and was duly announced.

All the great barons, including my lord of Burgundy and cheery Jean de Nesle were there in all their splendour.

At last a wider passage was cleared in the centre of the nave and a herald, clothed in scarlet, embroidered with the Fleur-de-lis of France, proclaimed, as he flung open the south door:

"His Majesty, the KING!"

All heads were turned, necks were craned and men and women rose on tip-toe to see the arrival of Philip Augustus and Madame Agnes in their royal robes. But there was disappointment in store for them. The King came alone, attended only by his page Albret, and he wore the battered, tarnished armour that had seen him through his worst wars. A few paces behind him came his body guard, under the command of Jean Belin, who led his men to the space cleared for them.

Albret turned to look at Eve as he entered. She was pale and sad. Her eyes bore traces of frequent tears and her dress was all black. She had at last given up hope and donned mourning for her royal foster-sister. She answered his gaze with a tender little smile, but her heart was too full of sorrow for her personal affairs to have much interest at that moment.

"Where is the Queen?" was the question that rose to all lips.

The King knelt for a few minutes before the altar, after which he rose and faced the Council who were sitting in a semi-circle within the choir.

"My most reverend Fathers in God," he said, "whatever decision you may have come to, is now immaterial.

"Your assembly has become purposeless, and I give you my royal permission to dissolve the Council."

"Philip of France," cried the legate, pale with indignation, "you did not call us together and you are powerless to disband the Council convened by his Holiness!"

The King raised his mail-covered right hand to Heaven, and said:

"God works his will without our aid, most reverend Fathers. Your consultations are no longer to the purpose, seeing that the King of France has now but *one wife*."

A prolonged murmur ran through the ranks of the ecclesiastics, and a cry of horror rang through the assembled multitude, for these words confirmed the worst suspicions of most of those present.

Some of the bolder spirits ventured to say:

"The King had two wives, one he hated and the other he loved. It's the one he hated who's dead, of course!"

"Here comes the one he loves!" cried several near the door. And in truth there was Madame Agnes arrayed in her royal robes and wearing the crown of a Queen Consort, descending from her gilded litter with the assistance of Amaury Montruel.

As she was about to set foot inside the Cathedral, the gruff voice of Captain Antoine Cadocu, cried out: "Halt, there!" and while two halberds barred her entrance to the building her companion was pushed quickly inside. The prelates were holding a whispered consultation, and King Philip Augustus watched the little scene enacted with such rapidity before the door without making any sign of favour or disapproval. It was as if he had not known the people concerned in it.

When Montruel had recovered from the sudden shock, he prepared to advance to the King's side, but as he passed under the shed containing the statue, an instantaneous gleam of intelligence was seen in the eyes of the negroes. There was an imperceptible movement somewhere, the statue tottered on its base, and then reeled heavily forward, descending with a terrific crash upon the treacherous "Friend of the King." In the very way that he had bartered for his master to end his days, he fell himself—crushed and mangled under the image of the woman whose undoing he had sought so eagerly.

(To be concluded.)

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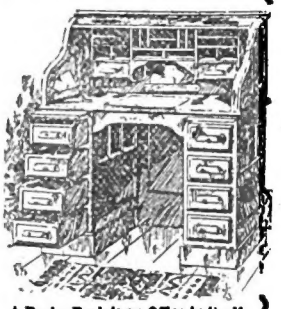

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AIDS TO ACCURACY.

WITH this number of *Short Stories* is presented a supplement dealing with the FRESH AIR FUND. I should consider it a great favour on the part of my readers if they would do their best to get together a few subscriptions for this charity. *Short Stories* has always done its part well during the existence of the FRESH AIR FUND, and I feel sure that its readers will not go back on their past performances. Ninepence, as perhaps you are already aware, covers the total expenses—railway, food and drink—of one little ragged child for a whole summer's day.

R. H. W.—A wind from the south-west gives the steadiest and most continuous rain; the west to north-west the heaviest, but the latter is an intermittent downpour. More rain has been known to fall in fifteen minutes with the wind veering from west to north-west than has fallen during a day during a similar storm with the wind in the south-west.

ABSTAINER writes to ask whether the consumption of beer, tobacco or tea increases fastest in this country. ——The consumption of tea has increased most during the last ten years; tobacco comes next, and beer comes third.

W. K.—Henry VIII. was the first of the Kings of England to insist upon being addressed as "Your Majesty." Before that time, the sovereign was addressed as "Your Highness," "Your Grace," or "Your excellent Grace."

CABBY.—Yes, it is quite true. If you had lived two or three centuries ago, you would probably have had to choose some other way of making a living, for in the year 1635 a royal decree was issued to the effect that no hackney coaches were to be "used or suffered" in London or Westminster, unless they were to travel three miles out of town, and it was further provided that no one should go in a coach in the streets unless the owner of the coach constantly maintained four able horses for the Royal service when required.

D. D.—You may be surprised to hear that if the Queen were to call all the policemen of England with their officers to a review, an army of nearly 40,000 men would have to pass before her.

I. I. I. wants to know if blindness is more prevalent among women than among men.——No; quite the contrary. Blind men outnumber blind women two to one.

R. E.—Earthenware sleepers are in use on some of the Japanese Railways.

NOVA-SCOTIA.—The number of men estimated as being employed in the world's navies, is 1,693,000.

A NOTTINGHAM reader, signing himself "Shoreham," writes: "I send you herewith a cutting from the Nottingham *Evening Post*, of Tuesday last, and I think you will admit it is sufficiently startling when taking into consideration the possibilities evolved by Mr. M. P. Shiel in his most excellent story, 'The Empress of the Earth.' Evidently something is going to happen in that part of the globe, and it is apt to make one wonder whether Yen How is simply a creation of the novelist's brain or an actual possibility and fact." The newspaper cutting reads as follows: "According to a North China paper, the people inhabiting the Yangtse Valley have recently begun to quietly arm themselves, and they are being gradually supplied with firearms though various influential quarters. Something is evidently expected to happen in the near future, and the leaders of public opinion amongst the masses are apparently trying to prepare the minds of the latter for some crisis."

"THE Empress of the Earth," has, it appears, aroused the interest of our readers in all things Chinese. Several readers have written to ask why the term "Celestials" is applied to the natives of China.——This appellation is probably the outcome of the Chinese custom of speaking of the reigning dynasty as *Tien-chao*, or "Heavenly Dynasty." The designation is no doubt based on the claim of the founder of each successive dynasty to have received the command of Heaven to punish and supersede a line of wicked rulers, he and his successors therefore becoming *Tien-su*, or, "sons of Heaven."

H. V., another admirer of Mr. Shiel's story, asks: "What is the circumference of the walls of Pekin, and how many gates are there?"——The outer great wall of Pekin is twenty-seven miles in circumference. There are thirteen gates, but though finely arched, they are insignificant, being only twenty feet high. At night they are closed with great doors sheathed with iron, and no one can pass in or out.

C. C.—The umbrella was described in early dictionaries as a "portable penthouse to be carried in a person's hand to screen him from violent rain or heat." John Macdonald, writing about the year 1778, says that he had a fine silk umbrella which he had brought from Spain; but when he went out with it, people called him a Frenchman and asked him why he did not hire a coach. The drivers of hackney coaches were much annoyed, believing that the introduction of the umbrella would seriously affect their trade.

COTTON MILL.—The finest cotton in the world comes from Egypt; the only kind that can compete with it is the Sea Island (America) production, which is limited in quantity. Indian cotton is poorer in quality and has only one-eighth the yield per acre of Egyptian cotton. Jumel, a Frenchman, conceived the idea of cultivating cotton in the land of the Pharaohs in 1820, and astute Mehemet Ali saw the value of it and favoured the project.

EQUINE.—A blind horse will gallop round a field without knocking against the surrounding fence. The sense of smell informs the animal of its proximity.

KATIE asks: "Who was 'Peter the Wild Boy'?"——He was a savage creature found in the Harzwald, in the Electorate of Hanover, when George I. and his friends were hunting. He was walking on his hands and feet climbing trees like a squirrel, and eating grass and moss. That was in 1725, and he was supposed to be thirteen years old. He was brought to this country and lived for a number of years, but no change could be effected in his habits.

CHARLES G. writes: "My sister and I have been having a discussion on the subject of biting off the ends of thread or silk instead of using the scissors. I contend, among other things, that it is likely to be dangerous from a hygienic point of view; she replies that I am too fussy about health. What is your opinion?"——That the weight of evidence appears to be on your side. It has recently been discovered in France that lead poisoning has resulted from biting off the ends of silk. Investigation revealed that advantage is taken of the dyeing process to add lead salts, which the thread partly absorbs. That makes it heavier, which means so much extra profit, because silk thread is sold by weight.

Notice to Competitors.

IN all Prize Competitions the Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entertained when once a competition is finished and the result published.

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75in. by 96in.	9lb.	13s. 0s.	37s.
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3	9	0	by 9	0	8/6	13/6
4	10	6	by 7	6	8/9	13/9
5	10	6	by 9	0	10/0	15/6
6	12	0	by 9	0	11/6	18/0

Lot 60. SIZES and PRICES. No.	ft.	in.	ft.	in.	Sale Price.	Former Price.
7	12	0	by 10	6	13/6	20/6
8	13	6	by 10	6	15/3	24/0
9	12	0	by 12	0	15/3	24/0
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11	15	0	by 12	0	19/0	32/0
12	18	0	by 12	0	22/9	36/0

These Carpets are splendid imitations of real Brussels Carpets, the designs having been carefully copied from the originals, both as regards colourings and patterns, so that when in use it is almost impossible, except by close scrutiny, to detect the difference. All designs are registered, and deservedly considered works of art. We can confidently recommend them for use in the dining and drawing rooms, or any rooms and landings where hard wear is a necessity.

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THE NEW HOLIDAY ALPHABET.

A is for **ANGLING,** Oh! sport filled with bliss.
(A for the Aches **BEECHAM'S PILLS** can dismiss.)

B is for **BATHING,** of all fun the king,
(B for the Bloom **BEECHAM'S PILLS** always bring.)

C is for **COACHING,** o'er mountains afar.
(C for Convenient, **BEECHAM'S PILLS** ever are.)

D is for **DANCING,** by bright 'lectric light.
(D for Dyspepsia **BEECHAM'S PILLS** soon put right.)

E for **ENJOYMENT** of every kind.
(E for Expedient **BEECHAM'S PILLS** you will find.)

F for **FLIRTATIONS**—so oft doomed to vanish.
(F for the Faintings that **BEECHAM'S PILLS** banish.)

G is for **GOLFING,** on earth the best game.
(G for the Guinea of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** fame.)

H is for **HAPPINESS,** health will ensure.
(H for the Headache **BEECHAM'S PILLS** always cure.)

I is for **INNOCENT**—we ever are that.
(I for Insomnia, **BEECHAM'S PILLS** can combat.)

J is for **JOURNEYS** by sea, lake, and land.
(J for the Joy **BEECHAM'S PILLS** will command.)

K is for **KISSES**—a few on the sly.
(K is for Keep **BEECHAM'S PILLS** always by.)

L is for **LOVEMAKING,** delights never dying.
(L is for Languor, **BEECHAM'S PILLS** can send flying.)

M is for **MUSIC,** each day on the pier.
(M is for Matron who holds **BEECHAM'S PILLS** dear.)

N is for **NOVELS,** to read at your ease.
(N for the Nightmare **BEECHAM'S PILLS** can appease.)

O for the **OCEAN,** alive night and day.
(O for Obstructions **BEECHAM'S PILLS** clear away.)

P is for **PICNICS,** for pleasure in quest.
(P stands for Pills, **BEECHAM'S PILLS** are the best.)

Q for **QUEEN'S WEATHER,** that all may go well.
(Q for the Qualmishness **BEECHAM'S PILLS** quell.)

R is for **ROWING,** for young men the thing.
(R for Relief **BEECHAM'S PILLS** quickly bring.)

S is for **SWITCHBACK,** the fun of the age.
(S is for Sickness **BEECHAM'S PILLS** soon assuage.)

T is for **TENNIS,** the game to allure.
(T for the Trembling **BEECHAM'S PILLS** always cure.)

U is for **UNDER THE AWNING,** at night.
(U for Unfitness **BEECHAM'S PILLS** soon put right.)

V is for **VALLEYS** and wide wealth of view.
(V for the Vertigo **BEECHAM'S PILLS** soon subdue.)

W for **WHEELING,** which thousands love well.
(W for Weariness **BEECHAM'S PILLS** dispel.)

X is for **'XTRAS** you find in your bill.
(X stands for 'Xcellent **BEECHAM'S PILLS** still.)

Y is for **YACHTING,** grand sport here revealed.)
(Y for the Youth **BEECHAM'S PILLS** quickly yield.)

Z for the **ZOO,** for young folks just the thing.
(Z for the Zest **BEECHAM'S PILLS** ever bring.)

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